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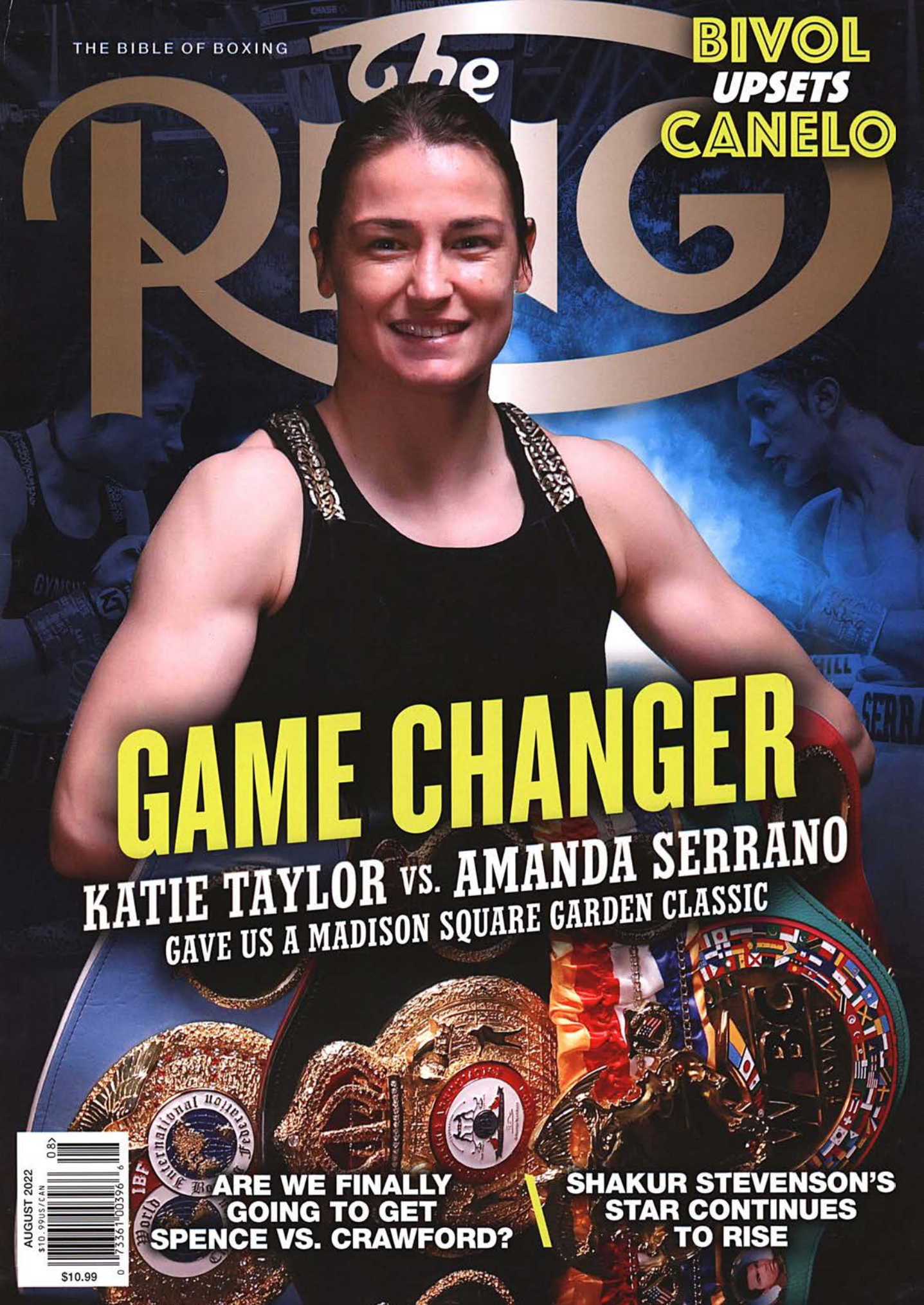
BIVOL UPSETS CANELO



GAME CHANGER

KATIE TAYLOR VS. AMANDA SERRANO GAVE US A MADISON SQUARE GARDEN CLASSIC

ARE WE FINALLY GOING TO GET SPENCE VS. CRAWFORD?

SHAKUR STEVENSON'S STAR CONTINUES TO RISE

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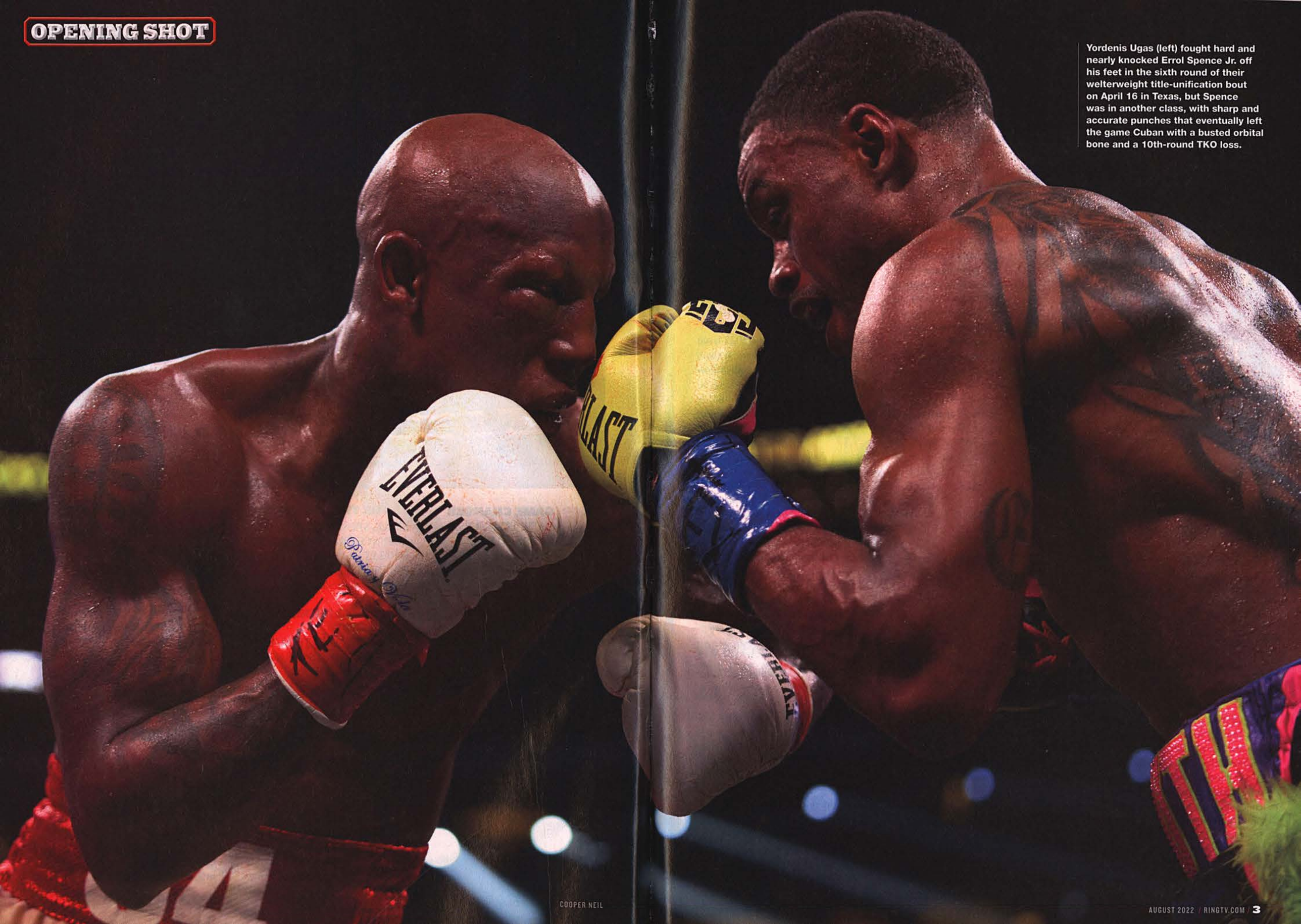
The boxing world stopped when Katie Taylor and Amanda Serrano faced off at Madison Square Garden.

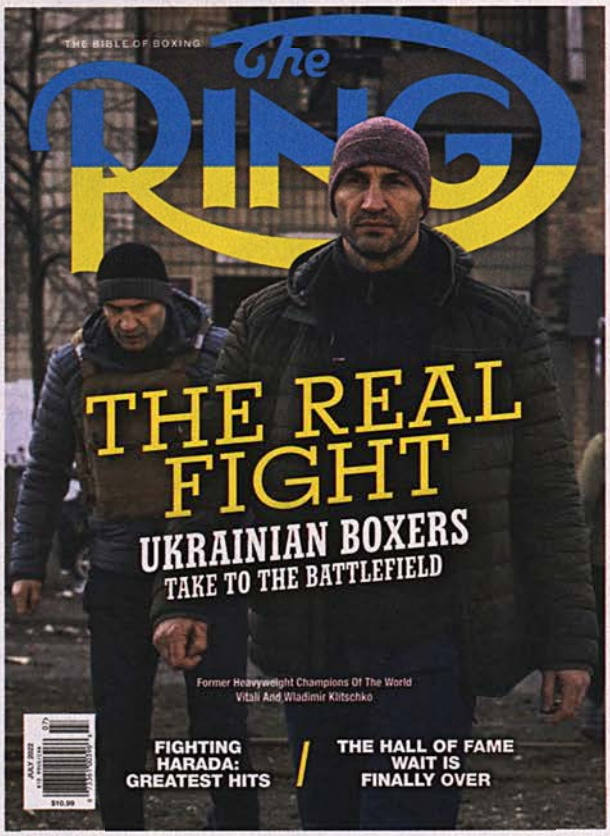
COVER PHOTO BY MELINA PIZANO/MATCHROOM



Yordenis Ugas (left) fought hard and nearly knocked Errol Spence Jr. off his feet in the sixth round of their welterweight title-unification bout on April 16 in Texas, but Spence was in another class, with sharp and accurate punches that eventually left the game Cuban with a busted orbital bone and a 10th-round TKO loss.

COOPER NEIL

NAVIGATING GEOPOLITICAL FAULT LINES IN BOXING



The Ring Magazine's coverage of Ukrainian boxers currently defending their homeland against the Russian invasion was outstanding. The likes of Lomachenko, Usyk, Postol and the Klitschko brothers have demonstrated exemplary bravery in the face of Russian aggression. However, Wladimir Klitschko's comments that Russian fighters like Dmitry Bivol should be barred from competing are deserving of closer scrutiny.

Klitschko's position is understandable, and promoters, sports journalists and the sanctioning bodies have already rushed to condemn Putin's horrific invasion of Ukraine. Unfortunately, it is all too easy to subscribe to a blanket moratorium of all things Russian. While the bans on the Russian flag and anthem are reasonable, preventing Russian boxers like Bivol from fighting entirely is overreach.

Vladimir Putin operates an Orwellian state wherein dissent is monitored and punished by a shadowy network of internal intelligence and secret police agencies. Should athletes like Bivol decry Russian militarism, their families would face fierce reprisals.

Moreover, as a Kyrgyz-born Korean-Moldovan, Dimitry Bivol represents the kind of cosmopolitan Russia Putin's aggressively Slav-nationalist agenda seeks to erase. Even if Putin and like-minded Russian ultra-nationalists claim Bivol's win against Canelo as a win for Russia, boxing is the pursuit of individual glory, and victory remains Bivol's alone.

Moving forward, the boxing community should reflect on the sweet science's long and noble history of transcending race and nationality and evaluate the participation of Russian boxers based on their ability and character, not their passports.

Joshua Brannon
Sydney, Australia

The unanimous decision by Dmitry Bivol over Canelo Alvarez demonstrates the old boxing adage that "a good big man will always defeat a good smaller man." This usually happens to middleweights who challenge light heavyweight or heavyweight champions. Recall Jack Johnson's KO of Stanley Ketchel in 1909 and Joey Maxim's stoppage of the great Sugar Ray Robinson in 1952.

Valentine J. Belfiglio
Dallas, Texas

For some reason, I am just as happy as when Adrien Broner lost to Marcos Maidana. Congrats, Dmitry Bivol! You never fell into any mind games and showed great skill. Canelo obviously didn't know his opponent this time; he kept trying to use that same ugly uppercut and never connected. He just wasn't going to win without changing tactics, which he never did. I could see the frustration when he got peppered by Bivol. It's baffling that he still thinks he won.

Errol Ian Ave Acosta
Jacksonville, North Carolina

On page 23 of your June 2022 issue (The 100 Greatest Punchers of the Last 100 Years), you write that Doc Williams was the one man to KO Joey Maxim. It was actually Curtis Sheppard.

Allen Morris
Belle River, Ontario Canada

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF'S RESPONSE: Good grief! You are 100 percent correct, Allen. I penned that page on the No. 2-rated Archie Moore and I have no idea how I got my wires crossed like that in mixing up those two members of "Murderer's Row." Moore fought them both, but Maxim never faced Charley "Doc" Williams. The next time I write a historical article I might just have to employ you as a proofreader. Well done!

From Friday Night Fights on TV in the 1950s to my position as a ringside physician for the state of Ohio in the 2020s, I have been a fan of boxing for many years.

Last week I decided to watch the Showtime PPV bout of Errol Spence vs. Yordenis Ugas.

Though my primary goal was to watch the talents and determination of the fighters in the main event, I always watch the preliminary bouts too.

Though in the (distant) past the preliminary fighters – Francisco

Vargas, Yuriorkis Gamboa and Josesito Lopez – may have been worthy opponents to their opposition that night, the three – with the possible exception of Lopez – showed that they had little-to-no business being in the ring against Jose Valenzuela, Isaac Cruz and Cody Crowley, respectively.

I seriously thought that I was observing and foreseeing three future mentally and physically limited retired fighters – many of whom are described in the books by Tris Dixon – *The Road to Nowhere* and *Damage* – which The Ring has reviewed in the past.

Whoever the matchmaker was for these fights likely did a major disservice to the future health and well-being of the three losers of these fights and to the boxing public as a whole. I think that a future article by The Ring exploring these poorly matched fights and what role Showtime PPV played in this scenario would be of great interest to your readers.

The health of these fighters and future fighters is too important for such predictable mismatches to take place – even if this has been the custom for many years.

Michael B. Hallet MD
New Albany, Ohio

IN MEMORY OF SIGFREDO ZAPATA

The Ring Magazine has lost a beloved member of its family. It's with a heavy heart that we announce the passing of Sigfredo "Ziggy" Zapata.

Ziggy was a crucial part of our International Boxing Hall of Fame induction weekend team. Every year, Ziggy would be found in Canastota, New York, with the legends of the sport and boxing fans from around the world, selling Ring Magazine merchandise, pushing the brand he loved.

The Ring Magazine was purchased from Kappa Publishing Group in 2007, and Ziggy was the account manager at our fulfillment company, Palm Coast Data. Ziggy made the transition painless. Through the years, Ziggy brought great ideas to the table for the marketing and management of The Ring brand and helped design numerous projects. Most recently Ziggy led the charge to change fulfillment companies and accomplished this seamlessly.

Ziggy was a bright light. He will be missed, and the world could use more men of his character.

Our hearts go out to Ziggy's parents, siblings, his partner, nieces, nephews, cousins, friends, and all who knew and loved him. We here at The Ring will miss him.

WRITE TO THE RING! Come Out Writing, The Ring, P.O. Box 90254, Brooklyn, NY 11209 comeoutwriting@gmail.com ★ Emailed letters will include a writer's email address unless a city and state of origin are provided. Letters may be edited for reasons of space and clarity.

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RINGSIDE BY DOUG FISCHER

PASSING OF THE TORCH

With the Katie Taylor-Amanda Serrano showdown in the rearview mirror, boxing pundits are wondering if the hugely successful event captured lightning in a bottle for one glorious night or if it set a new standard for women's boxing.

I posed that and other questions to former undisputed welterweight champion and future hall of famer **Cecilia Braekhus**, who was among the 19,187 that packed Madison Square Garden to witness the undisputed lightweight championship on April 30.

"I expected a good fight, but this exceeded every expectation," said Braekhus, who joined several reigning female world titleholders and retired legends of women's boxing in New York City the week of Taylor-Serrano.

Katie Taylor defended her lightweight championship in a battle for the ages.

Braekhus says Taylor-Serrano will be more than a "one-off" fight and event, believing that the close and entertaining nature of their matchup will lead to return bouts.

"I had Serrano as a close winner when I sat ringside, but [watching it again] at home I could agree with Taylor coming out on top," she said. "A draw would have also been fine. That's why I think we need a rematch. A trilogy would be a possibility too. Both women have what it takes for that inside but also outside the ring. Together they have an 'it factor' effect that is out of this world. I think a multi-bout series

Taylor and Serrano galvanized Irish and Puerto Rican fans in New York City but also commanded the attention of casual observers.

will elevate women's boxing the same way male rivalries have historically motivated fighters and captured the public's imagination."

Braekhus was also impressed with the Taylor-Serrano promotion, which was presented by Eddie Hearn's Matchroom Boxing, Jake Paul's Most Valuable Promotions (MVP) and DAZN. Having fought nine of her first 15 pro bouts – including her first title bout – in Germany, where women boxing stars, such as Regina Halmich, have been cultivated by promoters and networks for decades, Braekhus understands that promotion is just as important as the matchup.

"The promotion was electric," she said. "The combination of witnessing something historic at Madison Square Garden with a matchup at the highest level inside the ring made for such an incredible night. And finally, for the first time, there was a big boxing show where the past, present and future of women's boxing could meet, greet and exchange words. That was a personal highlight for me."

Braekhus fought primarily in Germany and Denmark from 2007 to 2014 because her home country of Norway had banned professional boxing since 1982. She lobbied government officials and the national sports commission for years until the ban was lifted – in part due to her success and charisma – and she was able to make her pro debut in Norway at The Spectrum arena in Oslo in 2016.

"The closest thing I have experienced to the Taylor-Serrano event was actually my own homecoming in Norway," Braekhus said. "I headlined a sold-out show in front of 10,000 people and the atmosphere was electric. Michael Buffer was in the ring announcing my fight, and ringside sat the prime minister, former heavyweight champion Wladimir Klitschko and several other luminaries.

"In Germany, Regina Halmich was selling out arenas and had millions of people watching every one of her fights on TV. I always knew it would eventually happen in the U.S. too, because my experience is that people don't care about gender when they get invested in fighters. With that said, it was still a bit emotional when it finally happened. I was very happy."

Braekhus is as accomplished as a prizefighter can be. She achieved undisputed champion status almost five years before Taylor did it at lightweight and Claressa Shields did it at middleweight. In fact, Braekhus was the only undisputed champion – male or female – in boxing when she outpointed Ivana Habazin, adding the IBF belt to the WBA, WBC and WBO titles she already held, in September 2014. (Terence Crawford joined her when he won the undisputed junior welterweight championship in 2017, and Oleksandr Usyk made it three when he was crowned undisputed cruiserweight champ in 2018).

Braekhus is the first female fighter to receive a Ring Magazine belt – the inaugural women's Pound-for-Pound Champion title in 2018 – and the first female boxer to be featured on HBO, as well as the first woman to headline an HBO World Championship Boxing card (for the network's final boxing broadcast in December 2018). No wonder she's known as the "First Lady of Boxing," eh? In 2020, Braekhus headlined a DAZN-streamed promotion against Jessica McCaskill, who ended her 11-year championship reign (and prevented Braekhus from breaking Joe Louis' all-division record of 25 title defenses).

Braekhus' appearances on HBO and DAZN (which included a rematch loss to McCaskill in March 2021) took place in the U.S., where she is respected by hardcore fans but was never able to equal the popularity she enjoyed in Europe. Without a rival as high profile and accomplished as Taylor or Serrano, Braekhus could never hope to be part of a matchup as commercially successful as the April 30 event.

One has to wonder if Taylor and Serrano will be out of marquee opponents once their rivalry runs its course. It's not often when an undisputed champ takes on a seven-division titleholder and both fighters happen to hail from boxing cultures that include diehard fan followings.

But Braekhus is hopeful. She says big fights create other big fights, which create more stars.

"I think Taylor and Serrano paved the way for a big Mikaela Mayer-Alycia Baumgardner showdown," said Braekhus.

Mayer-Baumgardner is the biggest women's fight to be made in the 130-pound division. Mayer, a 2016 U.S. Olympian who has been promoted by Top Rank and showcased on ESPN since turning pro in 2017, won the inaugural Ring women's junior lightweight title when she unified WBO and IBF belts with a rousing decision over Maiva Hamadouche last November. Baumgardner, who won the WBC title with a chilling standing KO of Terri Harper last November, is the hardest puncher in the 130-pound ranks. The two are already going at it on Twitter, and even male fans who claim not to follow women's boxing are paying attention.

The winner of Mayer-Baumgardner could easily step up to lightweight to challenge the winner of a Taylor-Serrano rematch (or rubber match). Serrano, whose natural weight class is featherweight (where she still holds two world titles), could challenge the Mayer-Baumgardner winner at junior lightweight.

All four have been in exciting fights, and any matchup between them should produce fireworks. Braekhus is confident the fights will be made for one primary reason – money. Top Rank will want to emulate the financial success that Matchroom, which promotes Baumgardner, had with MVP. Once networks experience how marketable women's boxing can be, Braekhus predicts, they will invest more in female fighters and the making of high-profile matchups.

The trend is already underway. Sky Sports is firmly behind staging a middleweight showdown between Shields and her hard-punching amateur nemesis, Savannah Marshall, in the fall. Golden Boy Promotions and DAZN are keen to make the rematch between undefeated two-division titleholder Seniesa Estrada and inaugural Ring women's flyweight champ Marlen Esparza, a grudge match that could headline a major show in Los Angeles or Texas.

"There is no limit in women's boxing," said Braekhus. "The burden has always been on women to perform with only scraps of what the men earn and very little promotion. This seems to be changing a bit now. There's still a road ahead, but when I started boxing more than 20 years ago, the first thing I was told was that girls can't be boxers. You don't hear that anymore."

ERICK W. RASCO

FIGHTER OF THE MONTH

BY TOM GRAY

TYSON FURY

The atmosphere was electric.

There were 94,000 fans inside Wembley Stadium – a record-breaking attendance on U.K. soil. Before the main event, the fans stood as one, bellowing out the lyrics of "Sweet Caroline" with enough gusto to threaten your eardrums. The noise was absolutely insane as fireworks flew high over England's national soccer stadium. It was already an unforgettable night in London, and we still had a heavyweight championship fight to get through.

Dillian Whyte (28-3, 19 KOs) had held a lofty position with the WBC for years – several of them as mandatory challenger. Quality wins over the likes of Joseph Parker (UD 12), Derek Chisora (SD 12, KO 11) and Oscar Rivas (UD 12) had established him as a heavyweight force to be reckoned with. And despite being derailed by Alexander Povetkin (KO by 5), a revenge win (KO 4) had put Whyte back in the pole position for his long-awaited world title shot.

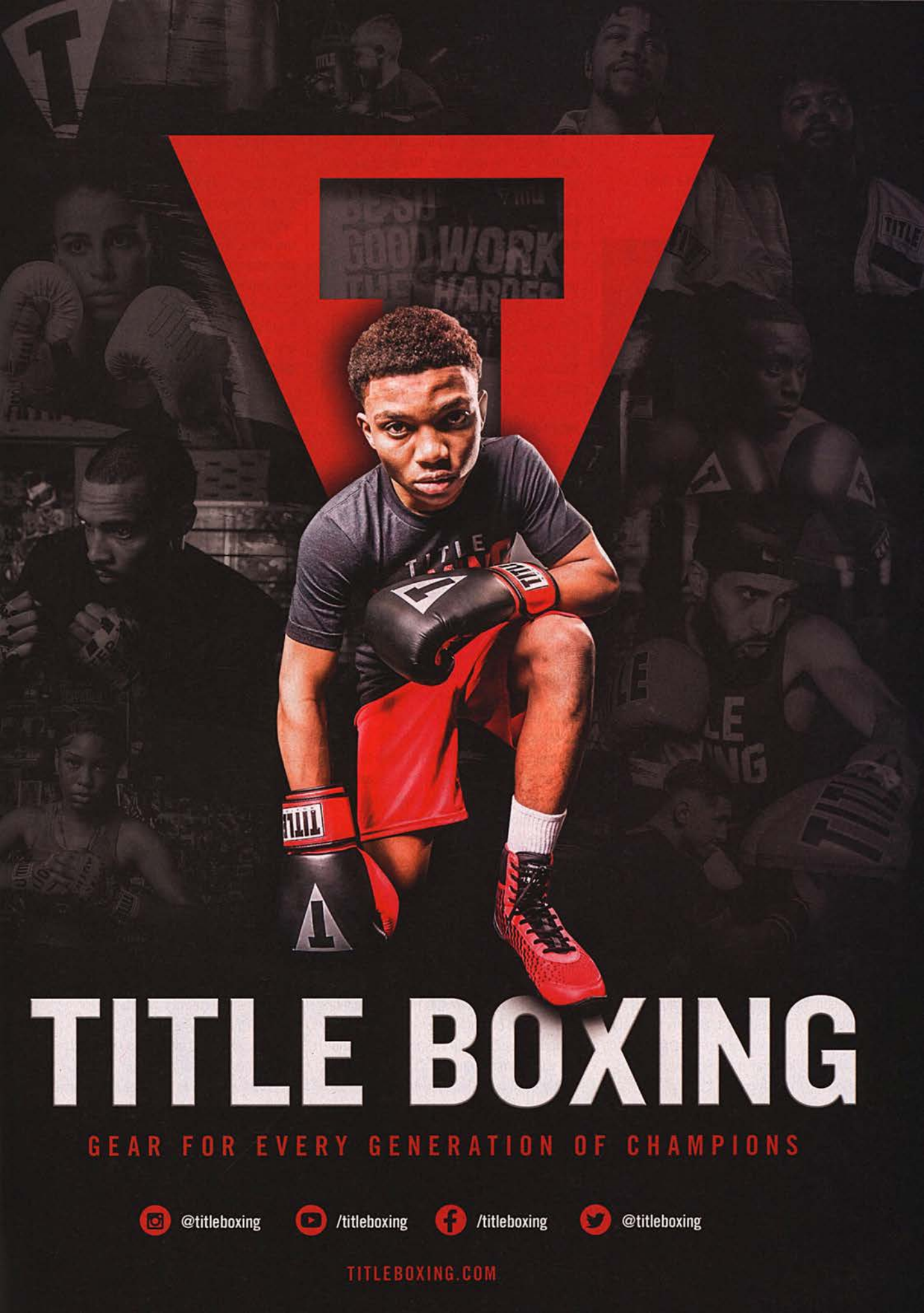
However, Tyson Fury, who is the Ring and WBC champion, looked all wrong for Whyte. He had so many advantages. Fury was quicker of hand and foot. He was taller and had a longer reach. He had superior ring craft. He had more experience at the elite level. Coming into the bout, the prevailing wisdom among experts was that Whyte had a puncher's chance. As it turned out, he had no chance at all.

Fury (32-0-1, 23 KOs) controlled the distance and counterpunched effectively when Whyte attempted to close the gap. As the rounds progressed, the challenger's frustration grew and it was clear that this would be Fury's night unless he made the craziest of unforced errors. Late in the sixth, Fury released his first right uppercut in anger – Whyte's two previous KO losses, to Anthony Joshua and Povetkin, came courtesy of uppercuts – and the punch landed on the button. The challenger was stunned upon impact and a little shove opened his parachute for a heavy landing at ring center. The gallant Whyte found his feet, but he was in no position to continue and referee Mark Lyson waved the bout off. The official time was 2:59.

Following Fury's complete domination, the only thing the assembled media could ask about at the post-fight press conference was the 33-year-old's constant assertions that he would retire from the sport following a near-perfect 14-year professional career.

"Definitely, I think so," was the paradoxical answer I got from the champion when I pressed him on the matter.

Can Fury really resist the temptation to face the Oleksandr Usyk-Anthony Joshua 2 winner in what would be a financial bonanza for undisputed honors? Time will tell, but one thing is indisputable: Right now, The Gypsy King reigns supreme in boxing's glamour division.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NEW FACES: RYOSUKE NISHIDA

By **Anson Wainwright**

AGE: 25
HOMETOWN: Osaka, Japan
WEIGHT CLASS: bantamweight
HEIGHT: 5-foot-7 (170 cm)
AMATEUR RECORD: 37-16
TURNED PRO: 2019
PRO RECORD: 5-0 (1 KO)
TRAINER: Kosuke Takeichi
MANAGER: Muto Boxing Gym
PROMOTER: Muto Boxing Gym
INSTAGRAM: ryosuke_nishida87

BEST NIGHT OF PRO CAREER AND WHY: Nishida scored an eye-catching win over former WBC flyweight titleholder Daigo Higa (17-2-1, 17 KOs) in April 2021.

"Even though it was my first fight at bantamweight [having previously fought at junior featherweight], I was actually in top shape," Nishida told The Ring through Hank Hakoda. "My condition was perfect, my body felt sharp and light, and my recovery was also very good for the fight. As a result, I was able to outpoint him comfortably, following my game plan."

The Japan Boxing Commission (JBC) and Tokyo Sportswriters Association were suitably impressed and awarded him the prestigious Rookie of the Year for 2021.

WORST NIGHT OF PRO CAREER AND WHY: The 25-year-old southpaw is most disappointed in his most recent outing against Tetsuro Ohashi in December 2021.

"I severely injured the ligaments in my right wrist," he explained. "My preparation, including sparring, was far less than what I wanted it to be. Somehow I managed the fight and won a lot easier than we had expected.

"Although it was an unsatisfactory performance, I learned loads from fighting in such a tough situation."

Nishida decided against surgery, but the injury has meant an extended time on the sidelines. He recently began light training and hopes to fight in early summer.

WHY HE'S A PROSPECT: In his formative years, Nishida won the flyweight youth championship at the National Sports Festival of Japan in 2014 and was champion of the Kansai (Western Japan) University Boxing League in 2018.

"My biggest assets are keeping my opponent at distance and using my right hand to control my foe," he said. "I am a right-handed southpaw. My stamina is also an advantage. Thanks to my super-hard treadmill workout routine, now I can fight harder without worrying about my stamina."

Nishida has aspirations of reaching the top of the bantamweight division.

"My goal is to become a world champion," he said. "I know I have to climb the ladder in a very competitive division. Once I get a chance, I will never let it go."

OPBF President Frank Hadley was particularly impressed with the manner in which Nishida defeated Higa.

"Nishida piled up points jabbing and moving in the early rounds," said Hadley. "Higa tried to catch Nishida with his harder punches, but Nishida was able to avoid that with his jab and excellent footwork."

WHY HE'S A SUSPECT: Nishida is a fine boxer but so far only has one stoppage. He is working on trying to create openings that will allow him to potentially score knockouts.

"My main focus is improving my offense to land my left hand more precisely," he said. "I have been on a mission to throw quicker combinations with more and more volume punches. I have shown some gradual improvement against [Shohei] Omori and Higa, but I will still have to keep it up."

Although Nishida has the wins over Omari and Higa, Hadley warns against moving too quickly and feels Nishida should learn his craft before looking to face opposition from overseas.

"My Japanese friends think that he needs to stay at regional level and defend the title a few times before stepping up to the next stage," said Hadley. "The OPBF has him rated as the mandatory challenger to Keita Kurihara. We are hoping to make that fight happen. We rate him very highly and we think he has a very big future, if guided well."

STORYLINES: Nishida grew up in a supportive working-class family. His father runs an iron factory, where Nishida and his brother work.

Nishida, who was a long-distance runner, became interested in boxing in junior high school.

"A friend of mine recommended I join the boxing team at Nara Prefectural Oji Technical High School at 16," he explained. "I did not plan to start boxing at all. I actually wanted to continue long-distance running to become a road-relay ekiden runner. (Editor's note: Ekiden is a Japanese form of relay racing that covers long distances, sometimes in varied terrain and over multiple days, while emphasizing teamwork.)

"However, they did not have enough runners to make up a team in the school. That's how my boxing career kicked off."

Nishida looks up to former WBC bantamweight titleholder Shinsuke Yamanaka as well as sublimely talented fellow southpaws Vasiliy Lomachenko and Guillermo Rigondeaux.

"Yamanaka fascinated me a lot when I was a high school student," he said. "I tried to copy his great southpaw skills.

"My manager always wants me to fight masterfully, like Rigondeaux and Lomachenko, who hit an opponent without getting hit. I am still learning from top fighters every day to move on to the next level."

Questions and/or comments can be sent to Anson at elraincoat@live.co.uk and you can follow him on Twitter @AnsonWainwright.

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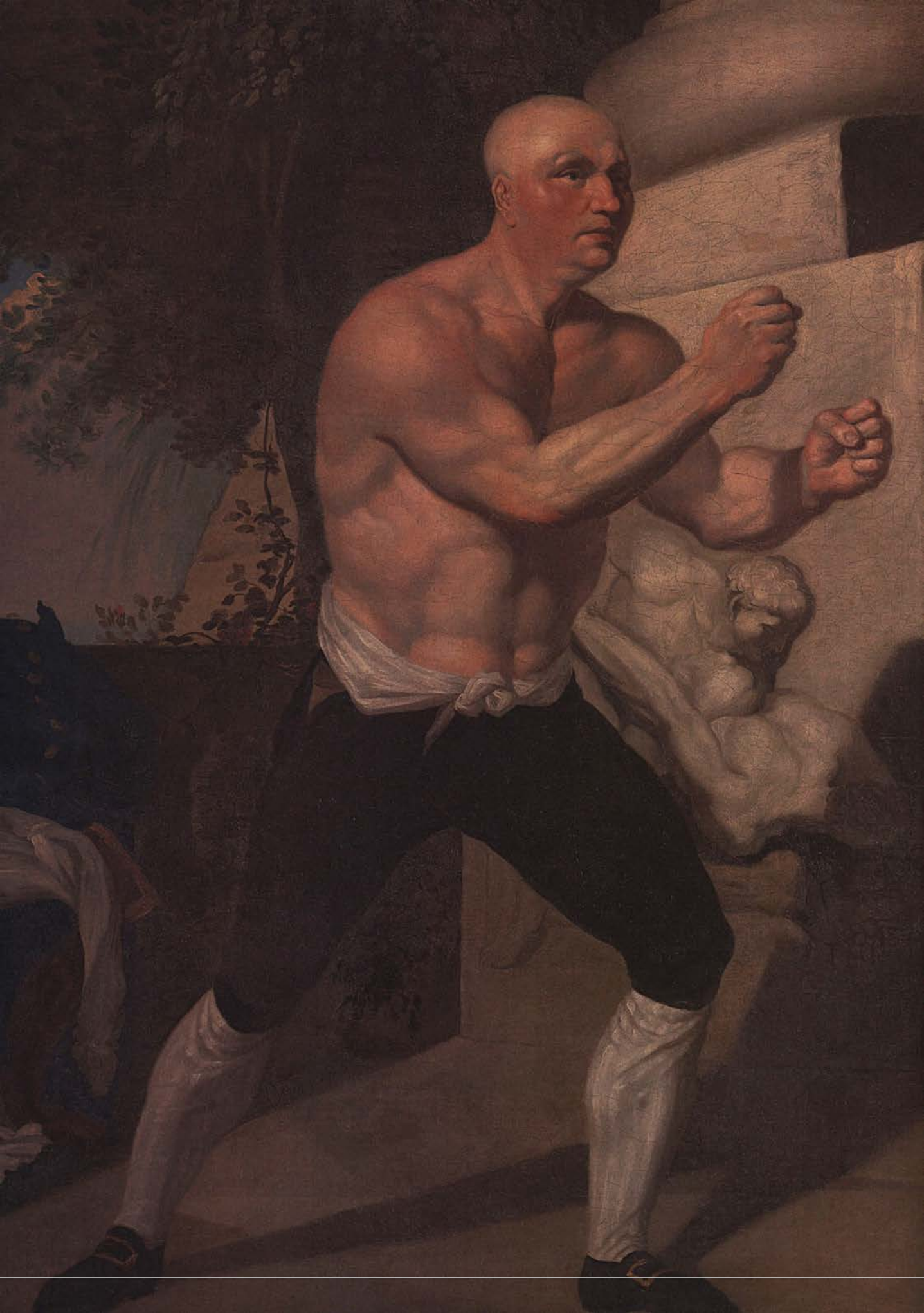


JABS AND STRAIGHT WRITES

BY THOMAS HAUSER

LITERARY NOTES

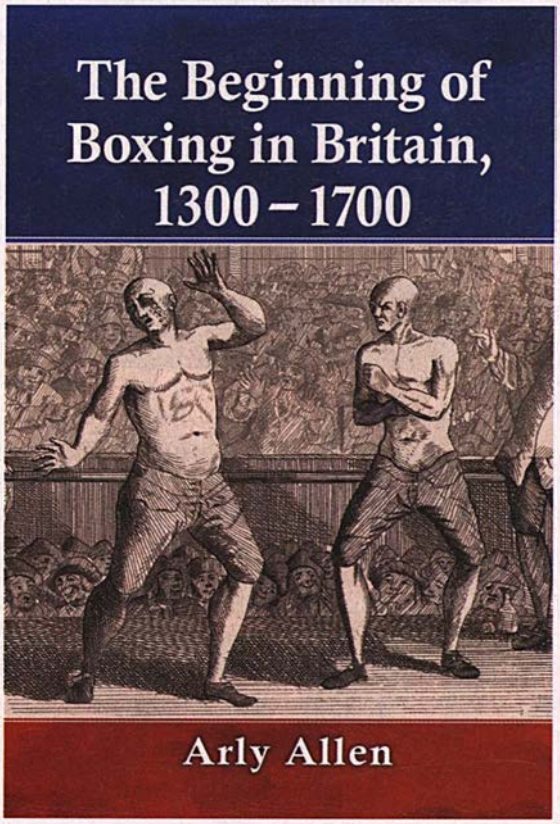
Five years ago, Arly Allen wrote an entertaining, well-researched biography of Jess Willard. Now he has turned his attention to a much earlier era.

The Beginning of Boxing in Britain, 1300-1700 (McFarland & Company) explores the murky origins of boxing and its evolution from military combat and crude everyday altercations to the germination of what is known today as the sweet science.

Boxing matches were contested in ancient Greece and Rome. But boxing as a sport disappeared from Europe at the close of that long-ago time. Allen writes, "We are unable to trace any reference to boxing in Western Europe from the fall of Rome (AD 410) until at least the beginning of the fourteenth century. We are unable to find any link between ancient and modern boxing. The best we can do is trace activities that might have influenced boxing. It had to be reinvented in a new form in the modern world."

This new form evolved in part from military combat, which was characterized in the Middle Ages by three distinct types of fighting – (1) with weapons on horseback, (2) with weapons on foot and (3) on foot with hands in the event that a combatant lost his weapon. Wrestling was taught as a military skill to deal with this latter contingency. It then developed into a non-military sport and an antecedent of boxing.

"When boxing-like activities reappeared in England at the beginning of the fourteenth century," Allen writes, "they were primarily the outgrowth of wrestling. While wrestling is not the only source that influenced the development of boxing, it was the primary source and had the greatest impact on the creation of the new sport."



Jack Broughton, the Father of Boxing, established prizefighting rules in the mid-1700s.

Little is known about the "boxing-like activities" in 14th-century England that Allen references. Organized fights began to appear circa 1550. They were, in Allen's words, "rag-tag affairs put on to entertain the meanest sort in society.

"By 1600," he continues, "separate rules existed that not only gave the new sport form but also allowed it to be recognized as different from wrestling and understood so by the public."

This crude boxing was something more than a fistfight. It was a fistfight governed by the concept of fair play and rules.

"Without rules," Allen explains, "sport would not be sport." In that regard, his thoughts on the boxing ring are instructive. "The ring," Allen writes, "was a spontaneous circle made by individual members of the crowd grabbing hands to create an open space in which the men could fight. The ring was a vital and essential feature of boxing [because] the ring creates order."

The first written notice of a boxing match that Allen has found dates to December 31, 1681, and appeared in a publication called The Protestant Mercury. It reports that, the previous day, the second Duke of Albemarle had matched his footman against a butcher and that the butcher "won the prize."

The following year, the Duke was reported to have entertained King Charles II with another boxing match.

Technique and rules evolved thereafter.

"By the early 1700s," Allen states, "boxing had been adopted by all levels of English society. Boxing was displacing the rapier and the duel of honor and was becoming the classical British method of settling quarrels. And boxing had also become an established method of British entertainment."

Allen has conducted an exhaustive amount of research. His work is 150 pages long followed by six appendices, 39 pages of notes and a 14-page bibliography. But a word of caution is in order. I don't have the tools to evaluate the accuracy of Allen's scholarship with regard to England during the years 1300 through 1700 or the credibility of his theories. But some of his assertions seem a bit implausible to me.

Allen states, "The rules of boxing were a powerful force for civilizing society." Were they? Or was it the other way around?

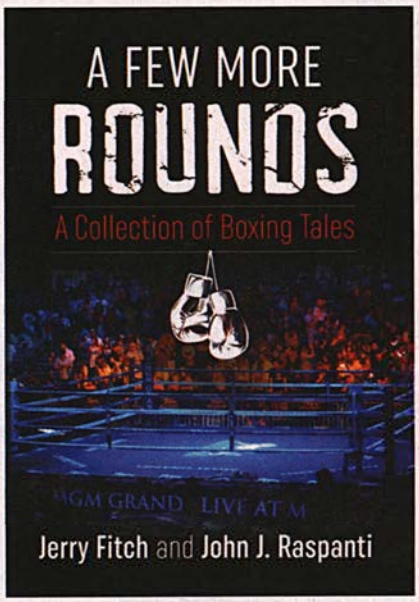
He writes, "Gambling made random play into sport. It converted disorganized local games into the organized national sports that we recognize today. Boxing, cricket, and horse-racing all owe their form and popularity to the control gambling imposed on their rules."

I think that's an overstatement. And moving to modern times, Allen states that Pete Rose was "sent to jail and permanently banned from baseball for gambling on games while he was a player and manager."

No! Pete Rose was banned from baseball for betting on games. But that had nothing to do with his imprisonment. He was imprisoned a year later after pleading guilty to two charges of filing false income tax returns that failed to report income from the sale of autographs and sports memorabilia. If Allen misstates that easily accessible fact, can readers fully trust him on more complex historical matters?

★★★

A Few More Rounds (Win by KO Publications) is a collection of essays separately written by Jerry Fitch and John J. Raspanti that view boxing through the prism of their own personal experiences. Portions of the book are likely to have more meaning to the authors than to readers. But there are some nice personal touches. Raspanti reflects on his father standing up for John's right to admire Muhammad Ali in an Oklahoma environment that ran counter to that sentiment. And Fitch crafts a moving portrait of heavyweight contender Jimmy Bivins, with whom he interacted on several occasions.



Bivins, by the way, engaged in 112 professional fights. Fitch notes that only six of his opponents had a losing record at the time he fought them. And three of these bouts against sub-.500 fighters were contested during Bivins' first year as a pro. That's a staggering statistic.

A Few More Rounds contains interesting nuggets of information. Philomena Gianfrancisco (Tony Zale's second wife) played in the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League with the Grand Rapids Chicks and Racine Belles from 1945 through 1948. Jean Terrell (Ernie Terrell's sister) replaced Diana Ross as lead singer for The Supremes when Ross left the group in 1970 to pursue a career as a solo artist.

There's also a quote from trainer Virgil Hunter that bears repeating: "I've had kids [with a great attitude] and I tell them what I can do for them. I can train them to be very exceptional at taking care of themselves on the street. As far as the ring is concerned, yes, they can compete. But they're not going to be a world champion. I can train them, and around their block they'll be a legend. But in the ring, it's always talent."

The most thought-provoking essay in the book is by Fitch and is entitled "Mixed Emotions." Fitch began watching boxing in the late-1950s and started writing about it in 1969. But he no longer follows the sport because of the brain damage that it inflicts on fighters.

"When I was defending boxing back in the day," Fitch writes, "I would point out the numerous injuries in other sports. Professional football has had so many players hurt via concussions from blows to the head. Soccer also has come under fire. In some cases leagues are now banning younger players from heading the ball. So other sports do cause injuries, but the focus in boxing of course is to hit your opponent as hard as possible in the head.

"When I watched fights as a young boy," Fitch continues, "I had no clue permanent damage was happening before my eyes. I was not aware of the life-altering damage that more than likely was happening. Even when I first started covering boxing and sitting ringside, I never thought much about the negative part of the sport. It was exciting and I thoroughly enjoyed it. I don't ever want to appear as a hypocrite. I will not get on a soapbox and call for a ban. I have no regrets that I was once very much involved in boxing. I have no regrets for loving boxing as much as I did. But I no longer can defend the sport. So these days I am strictly a boxing historian."

Thomas Hauser's email address is thomashauserwriter@gmail.com. His most recent book – Broken Dreams: Another Year Inside Boxing – was published by the University of Arkansas Press. In 2004, the Boxing Writers Association of America honored Hauser with the Nat Fleischer Award for career excellence in boxing journalism. In 2019, he was selected for boxing's highest honor – induction into the International Boxing Hall of Fame.

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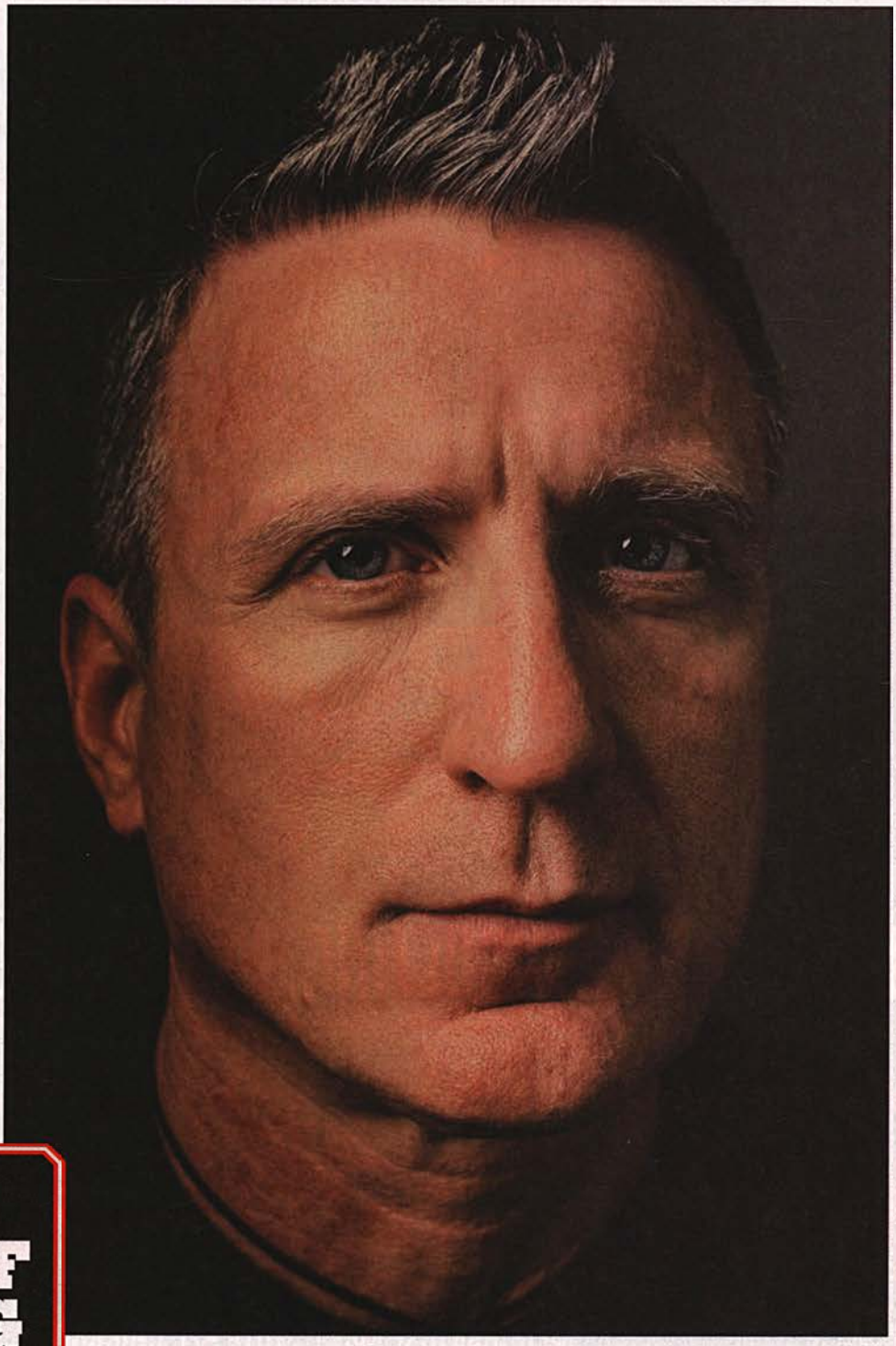
STITCH DURAN AND MIKE BAZZEL: CUTMEN IN THE SPOTLIGHT

PHOTOGRAPHS BY WOJTEK URBANEK • TEXT BY THOMAS HAUSER

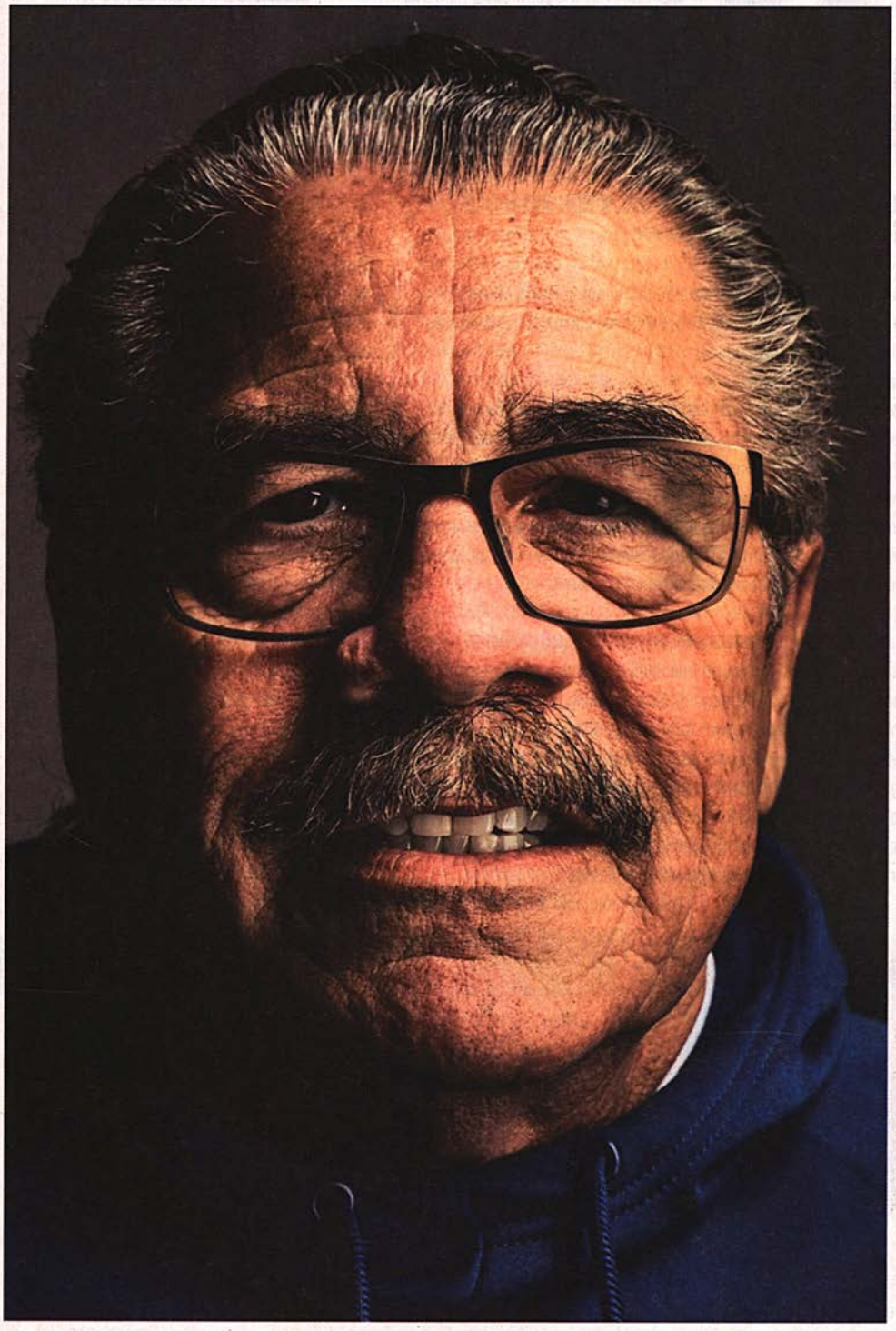


MIKE BAZZEL

On June 9, 2020, boxing returned from a three-month layoff occasioned by The Pandemic when a fight card promoted by Top Rank was televised on ESPN from the Grand Ballroom at the MGM Grand Hotel & Casino in Las Vegas. But the primary storyline wasn't the fights, which were largely fungible. It was the return of boxing in the Coronavirus Era and the health and safety protocols put in place by Top Rank and the Nevada State Athletic Commission. There were no spectators other than those on-site for official business. And to limit the number of people involved, Jacob "Stitch" Duran and Mike Bazzel worked in opposing corners as cutmen for all of the fights except in instances where a fighter's trainer or assistant trainer doubled as his cutman.

A cutman's work is both preventative and reactive. He doesn't wait for blood to begin treating an area of

THE FACE OF BOXING



swelling or other concern. In fact, if a cutman waits for blood, he might be starting too late.

The job involves both science and art. Stopping the flow of blood requires the use of a coagulant and the application of pressure. Some cutmen have a better feel for their task than others.

Time is of the essence. A cutman doesn't have the full minute between rounds to work with. It takes a fighter up to 10 seconds to get back to his corner after the bell rings ending a round. And the fighter's seconds are supposed to begin leaving the ring 10 seconds before the start of the next round. A good cutman is in the ring the moment a round ends. He might even start wiping the blood away from a cut as his charge is walking to the corner. By the time the fighter is on his stool, the cutman is working on the cut.

Four-round club fighters bleed the same way as world champions. If a fighter is cut, the cutman is the most important man in the arena during those 60 seconds between rounds.

A good cutman is invaluable to a fighter. Sometimes, he's the difference between winning and losing. As Flip Homansky (former medical director for the Nevada State Athletic Commission) noted, "The ring is the most unlikely operating room that I can imagine. And a medical degree is no guarantee that its holder knows much about jagged lacerations that are acutely bleeding. I've seen I don't know how many fights that were stopped because no one in the corner knew how to prevent a simple cut from getting worse."

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RATINGS

SUMMARY ★ ANALYSIS

The Ring Ratings through fights of May 7, 2022

RECENT FIGHT RESULTS AND CHANGES IN THE RING'S DIVISIONAL RANKINGS BY BRIAN HARTY

HEAVYWEIGHT: Tyson Fury jabbed, planted his feet and threw the uppercut – as fundamental and effective as it gets, when done correctly. Dillian Whyte very incorrectly caught that uppercut with his face, went down in Round 6 and couldn't recover, thus giving the champ his 23rd knockout. Will it be his last? Fury held on to his "C" position in the ratings while we wait to see if he's faking us out. Whyte's punishment was minor due to a lack of real noise being made by the lower half of the list; he dropped from No. 4 to No. 5.

CRUISERWEIGHT: Krzysztof Glowacki (No. 5 last month) was removed from the list after nearly two years of inactivity, so everyone under him got a bump and Germany's Noel Gevor entered at No. 10. Chris Billam-Smith got two bumps – from No. 10 to No. 8 – after knocking out Tommy McCarthy (unrated) with a chopping right cross in the eighth round of their rematch.

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHT: The story at 175 this month was obviously that of the Russian vs. the redhead, which you can read about on page 34. Ratings-wise, due to the magnitude of the win, there was no debate on whether **Dmitry Bivol** (No. 2 last month) should jump over countryman Artur Beterbiev into the No. 1 position, even though many would still favor Beterbiev in a head-to-head encounter. There was a suggestion to bring Canelo into the list somewhere, but the idea got shot down pretty quickly.

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHT: Fedor Chudinov (No. 8 last month) dropped out of the ratings after losing a unanimous decision to Azizbek Abdugofurov (who also beat Fedor's older brother Dmitrii in 2018), and the panel picked a Cuban amateur standout in David Morrell (currently 6-0, 5 KOs as a pro) to inherit the No. 10 spot.

JUNIOR MIDDLEWEIGHT: Liam Smith (No. 10 last month) capped a dominant performance against Jessie Vargas (unrated) with a 10th-round stoppage, thrilling the raucous crowd of Pond-crossers at Madison Square Garden (same card as Taylor vs. Serrano). It was enough to get "Beefy" a one-rank promotion.

WELTERWEIGHT: Errol Spence Jr. (No. 2 last month) headlined an active month for the 147-pound division, winning his title-unification clash with Yordenis Ugas (No. 3) by TKO in Texas. Ugas was game as hell in his encore to retiring Manny Pacquiao last August, even landing a right hand that nearly put Spence down in the sixth round, but two gloves, forearms and elbows weren't enough to shield him from the unpredictable array of hooks, uppercuts and bodyshots – lots of those – being dumped on him with increasing frequency as the rounds piled up. By the 10th round, his vision had become severely compromised by a swollen right eye, and the ringside doctor recommended calling it a night to save the cyclopic Cuban from further damage – a suggestion that was heeded by referee Laurence Cole at 1:44 (Ugas was later diagnosed with the dreaded orbital bone fracture). With the victory, Spence finally jumped over Terence Crawford into the No. 1 spot, but it's irrelevant – nobody really cares who's one or two on any given day, just as long as they face each other for the undisputed championship (read more about that on page 48). Ugas' reputation remained intact, as did his position on the list.

On the Spence-Ugas undercard, Eimantas Stanionis (No. 7 last month) won a split decision over Radzhab Butaev (No. 9 at the time) and they gained and lost a position, respectively. Going in the opposite direction from No. 10 to No. 9 was Conor Benn, who stopped Chris van Heerden in Manchester with a second-round beatdown.

LIGHTWEIGHTS: A weight-challenged Isaac Cruz (No. 6) floored an age-challenged Yuriorkis Gamboa four times en route to a fifth-round stoppage, affecting neither the ratings nor anyone's opinion of whether the fight should've happened in the first place.

JUNIOR LIGHTWEIGHT: With his more aggressive, frenetic style, Oscar Valdez seemed like the guy trying to prove something – mainly because that's just how he is but perhaps also to silence the lingering criticism of his failed PED test last year – but it was the smoothly efficient Shakur Stevenson who did just that, managing Valdez's attacks with superb reflexes and going on the offensive with a prodigy-level blend of speed and accuracy. And not just scoring points, as the Olympic silver medalist has been criticized for, but punching like a pro. Stevenson (No. 1 last month) would win a wide unanimous decision to unify two titles and take the vacant Ring championship.

Valdez technically hadn't been rated going into the fight because of the drug test situation, but the decision was made to put the magazine's belt up for grabs because it was clearly a matchup of the best 130-pounders in the world. Even with that, and even with Valdez assuming the No. 1 contender position AFTER the fight on the strength of his performance, Stevenson's victory almost looked easy.

BANTAMWEIGHT: Butler vs. Sultan. It sounds like the final boss battle of a video game called Class Warfare. In reality, Butler's original opponent, John Riel Casimero, was nixed for cutting weight in a sauna during fight week (illegal under British Boxing Board of Control

standards) and Jonas Sultan stepped in as a late replacement in Liverpool. Sultan lost a unanimous decision, and Butler subsequently replaced him at No. 10 in the ratings.

STRAWWEIGHTS: Masataka Taniguchi protected his WBO strap and position at No. 4 with an 11th-round stoppage of Kai Ishizawa, though Ishizawa weighed in at a corpulent 110 pounds and wasn't eligible to win the title anyway.

POUND FOR POUND: Two big winners this month – Errol Spence Jr. and Shakur Stevenson – were involved in serious P4P discussions between panelists but saw no change in their status, with Spence staying put at No. 5 and Stevenson remaining on the doorstep. Tyson Fury's name also came up. The debate surrounding Dmitry Bivol and Canelo Alvarez was on another level, though.

This was a little different from the "results vs. eye test" metrics that usually clog these deliberations. With Bivol and Canelo, it was a matter of how the cumulative weight of Canelo's accomplishments stacks up against Bivol's single achievement of beating the consensus No. 1 pound-for-pound fighter in the world – and doing it handily.

The first suggestion was to bring Bivol in at No. 3 and drop Canelo to No. 4. The pushback from another panelist was swift: "At the risk of sounding like a Dmitry Bivol hater (which I am definitely not; I have a lot of respect for him and his team and I'm happy for them), does he really HAVE to enter the pound-for-pound rankings? It was a brilliant performance and he beat the odds (and biased Vegas judging) in besting the reigning super middleweight champ, but it's one victory. Canelo should be knocked off his No. 1 perch, but he earned his way up the mythical rankings by climbing weight classes and winning multiple world titles vs. top-rated fighters. It took Canelo years to get inside of the P4P top five. It didn't happen with one fight. I know we ranked Teofimo Lopez in the P4P top 10 after his victory over Lomachenko, but look how well that aged."

With each new voice entering the debate, a different order was suggested. Everyone agreed that Canelo should drop to some degree and the vast majority felt Bivol should enter, but opinions were split on who should go above the other. Size became an important focus: Should Bivol's win be diminished because Canelo is just too small to challenge a natural light heavyweight, or did Bivol demonstrate more transcendent skills?

"Bivol's movement was terrific, and he was accurate with the jab. And because he was accurate, Canelo was biting on a lot of the feints coming his way," said another panelist. "As well as that, Bivol's defensive work was almost awe-inspiring. He negated Canelo's lead left hook and his big right hand, and he caught most of the body shots on the elbows. Canelo's most effective shot was the right uppercut, and that probably landed half a dozen times.

"[This describes] someone being a better boxer and not a bigger boxer. It wasn't a physical fight, in my opinion. We can't say that Canelo's punches didn't have the same effect that they'd have against a smaller man. The main problem for Canelo was that he couldn't find the target."

Canelo does have a ceiling, whether it was defined in this fight or not. So how much should his body of work matter? Ring Magazine championships and multiple world titles at 154, 160 and 168 pounds. Proven dominance against multiple high-quality opponents, his only other loss the result of a ludicrous decision to try and outbox Floyd Mayweather back in 2013. Bivol, meanwhile, has always been respected for his skills but only has one major – very major – victory. Nevertheless, he proved that he was critically underrated going into the Canelo fight, and one could argue that this is the first real chance he's had to show how good he really is.

For those who favored leniency toward Canelo, the final decision to lower him to No. 6 (making Oleksandr Usyk the new king) might seem disproportionate, but the pound-for-pound experiment should and does take place only in the present. As for Bivol, it was decided to introduce him at No. 8 and give him room to rise in the future, if that is his destiny. It was a very tough, very thoughtful debate. Perhaps the input we really need is that of Artur Beterbiev.

HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT UNLIMITED

C	**TYSON FURY** RING, WBC	U.K. • 32-0-1 (23 KOs)
1	**OLEKSANDR USYK** IBF, WBA, WBO	Ukraine • 19-0-0 (13 KOs)
2	**ANTHONY JOSHUA**	U.K. • 24-2-0 (22 KOs)
3	**DEONTAY WILDER**	U.S. • 42-2-1 (41 KOs)
4	**JOSEPH PARKER**	New Zealand • 30-2-0 (21 KOs)
5	**DILLIAN WHYTE**	U.K. • 28-3-0 (19 KOs)
6	**ANDY RUIZ JR.**	U.S. • 34-2-0 (22 KOs)
7	**LUIS ORTIZ**	Cuba • 33-2-0 (28 KOs)
8	**JOE JOYCE**	U.K. • 13-0-0 (12 KOs)
9	**FILIP HRGOVIC**	Croatia • 14-0-0 (12 KOs)
10	**FRANK SANCHEZ**	Cuba • 20-0-0 (13 KOs)

CRUISERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 200 POUNDS

C	**MAIRIS BRIEDIS** RING, IBF	Latvia • 28-1-0 (20 KOs)
1	**YUNIEL DORTICOS**	Cuba • 25-2-0 (23 KOs)
2	**LAWRENCE OKOLIE** WBO	U.K. • 18-0-0 (14 KOs)
3	**ILUNGA MAKABU** WBC	Congo • 29-2-0 (25 KOs)
4	**THABISO MCHUNU**	S. Africa • 23-6-0 (13 KOs)
5	**ALEKSEI PAPIN**	Russia • 13-1-0 (12 KOs)
6	**MATEUSZ MASTERNAK**	Poland • 46-5-0 (31 KOs)
7	**RICHARD RIAKPORHE**	U.K. • 14-0-0 (10 KOs)
8	**CHRIS BILLAM-SMITH**	U.K. • 15-1-0 (11 KOs)
9	**RYAD MERHY**	Belgium • 30-1-0 (25 KOs)
10	**NOEL GEVOR**	Germany • 26-2-0 (11 KOs)

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 175 POUNDS

C	**(VACANT)**	
1	**DMITRY BIVOL** WBA	Russia • 20-0-0 (11 KOs)
2	**ARTUR BETERBIEV** IBF, WBC	Russia • 17-0-0 (17 KOs)
3	**JOE SMITH JR.** WBO	U.S. • 28-3-0 (22 KOs)
4	**MAXIM VLASOV**	Russia • 46-4-0 (26 KOs)
5	**GILBERTO RAMIREZ**	Mexico • 43-0-0 (29 KOs)
6	**CALLUM SMITH**	U.K. • 28-1-0 (20 KOs)
7	**MARCUS BROWNE**	U.S. • 24-2-0 (16 KOs)
8	**ANTHONY YARDE**	U.K. • 22-2-0 (21 KOs)
9	**JOSHUA BUATSI**	U.K. • 15-0-0 (13 KOs)
10	**MATHIEU BAUDERLIQUE**	France • 21-1-0 (12 KOs)

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 POUNDS

C	**CANELO ALVAREZ** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO	Mexico • 57-2-2 (39 KOs)
1	**DAVID BENAVIDEZ**	U.S. • 25-0-0 (22 KOs)
2	**CALEB PLANT**	U.S. • 21-1-0 (12 KOs)
3	**BILLY JOE SAUNDERS**	U.K. • 30-1-0 (14 KOs)
4	**ANTHONY DIRRELL**	U.S. • 34-2-2 (25 KOs)
5	**JOHN RYDER**	U.K. • 31-5-0 (17 KOs)
6	**DAVID LEMIEUX**	Canada • 43-4-0 (36 KOs)
7	**CHRISTIAN MBILLI**	France • 21-0-0 (19 KOs)
8	**ZACH PARKER**	U.K. • 22-0-0 (16 KOs)
9	**LERRONE RICHARDS**	U.K. • 16-0-0 (3 KOs)
10	**DAVID MORRELL**	Cuba • 6-0-0 (5 KOs)

MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 POUNDS

- **C** (VACANT)
- **1** **GENNADIY GOLOVKIN** IBF, WBA
  Kazakhstan • 42-1-1 (37 KOs)
- **2** **JERMALL CHARLO** WBC
  U.S. • 32-0-0 (22 KOs)
- **3** **DEMETRIUS ANDRADE** WBO
  U.S. • 31-0-0 (19 KOs)
- **4** **JAIME MUNGUIA**
  Mexico • 39-0-0 (31 KOs)
- **5** **CHRIS EUBANK JR.**
  U.K. • 32-2-0 (23 KOs)
- **6** **ZHANIBEK ALIMKHANULY**
  Kazakhstan • 11-0-0 (7 KOs)
- **7** **RYOTA MURATA**
  Japan • 16-3-0 (13 KOs)
- **8** **CARLOS ADAMES**
  Dom. Rep. • 21-1-0 (16 KOs)
- **9** **SERGIY DEREVYANCHENKO**
  Ukraine • 13-4-0 (10 KOs)
- **10** **FELIX CASH**
  U.K. • 15-0-0 (10 KOs)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 POUNDS

- **C** **JERMELL CHARLO** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC
  U.S. • 34-1-1 (18 KOs)
- **1** **BRIAN CASTANO** WBO
  Argentina • 17-0-2 (12 KOs)
- **2** **SEBASTIAN FUNDORA**
  U.S. • 19-0-1 (13 KOs)
- **3** **JARRETT HURD**
  U.S. • 24-2-0 (16 KOs)
- **4** **ERISLANDY LARA**
  Cuba • 28-3-3 (16 KOs)
- **5** **TIM TSZYU**
  Australia • 21-0-0 (15 KOs)
- **6** **TONY HARRISON**
  U.S. • 29-3-1 (21 KOs)
- **7** **ERICKSON LUBIN**
  U.S. • 24-2-0 (17 KOs)
- **8** **MAGOMED KURBANOV**
  Russia • 22-0-0 (13 KOs)
- **9** **LIAM SMITH**
  U.K. • 31-3-1 (18 KOs)
- **10** **ISRAIL MADRIMOV**
  Uzbekistan • 8-0-0 (6 KOs)

WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 POUNDS

- **C** (VACANT)
- **1** **ERROL SPENCE JR.** IBF, WBA, WBC
  U.S. • 28-0-0 (29 KOs)
- **2** **TERENCE CRAWFORD** WBO
  U.S. • 38-0-0 (22 KOs)
- **3** **YORDENIS UGAS**
  Cuba • 27-5-0 (12 KOs)
- **4** **JARON ENNIS**
  U.S. • 28-0-0 (26 KOs)
- **5** **VERGIL ORTIZ JR.**
  U.S. • 18-0-0 (18 KOs)
- **6** **EIMANTAS STANIONIS**
  Lithuania • 14-0-0 (9 KOs)
- **7** **KEITH THURMAN**
  U.S. • 30-1-0 (22 KOs)
- **8** **DAVID AVANESYAN**
  Russia • 29-3-1 (17 KOs)
- **9** **CONOR BENN**
  U.K. • 21-0-0 (14 KOs)
- **10** **RADZHAB BUTAEV**
  Russia • 14-1-0 (11 KOs)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 POUNDS

- **C** **JOSH TAYLOR** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO
  U.K. • 19-0-0 (13 KOs)
- **1** **REGIS PROGRAIS**
  U.S. • 27-1-0 (23 KOs)
- **2** **JOSE RAMIREZ**
  U.S. • 27-1-0 (17 KOs)
- **3** **JOSE ZEPEDA**
  U.S. • 35-2-0 (27 KOs)
- **4** **JACK CATTERALL**
  U.K. • 26-1-0 (13 KOs)
- **5** **SUBRIEL MATIAS**
  Puerto Rico • 18-1-0 (18 KOs)
- **6** **ARNOLD BARBOZA**
  U.S. • 26-0-0 (10 KOs)
- **7** **SHOHJAHON ERGASHEV**
  Uzbekistan • 21-0-0 (19 KOs)
- **8** **BATYR AKHMEDOV**
  Russia • 9-1-0 (8 KOs)
- **9** **GARY ANTUANNE RUSSELL**
  U.S. • 15-0-0 (15 KOs)
- **10** **SANDOR MARTIN**
  Spain • 40-2-0 (13 KOs)

Jessie Vargas' trunks were thoroughly stained with his own blood by the time Liam Smith ended their junior middleweight contest with a 10th-round TKO.

Conor Benn gained a spot in the welterweight rankings after administering a two-round thrashing to South African veteran Chris van Heerden.

LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 POUNDS

- **C** **GEORGE KAMBOSOS JR.** RING, IBF, WBA, WBO
  Australia • 20-0-0 (10 KOs)
- **1** **TEOFIMO LOPEZ**
  U.S. • 16-1-0 (12 KOs)
- **2** **VASILIY LOMACHENKO**
  Ukraine • 16-2-0 (11 KOs)
- **3** **DEVIN HANEY** WBC
  U.S. • 27-0-0 (15 KOs)
- **4** **GERVONTA DAVIS**
  U.S. • 26-0-0 (24 KOs)
- **5** **RYAN GARCIA**
  U.S. • 22-0-0 (18 KOs)
- **6** **ISAAC CRUZ**
  Mexico • 23-2-1 (16 KOs)
- **7** **JOSEPH DIAZ JR.**
  U.S. • 32-2-1 (15 KOs)
- **8** **RICHARD COMMEY**
  Ghana • 30-4-0 (27 KOs)
- **9** **JAVIER FORTUNA**
  Dom. Rep. • 37-3-1 (26 KOs)
- **10** **GUSTAVO LEMOS**
  Argentina • 28-0-0 (18 KOs)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 POUNDS

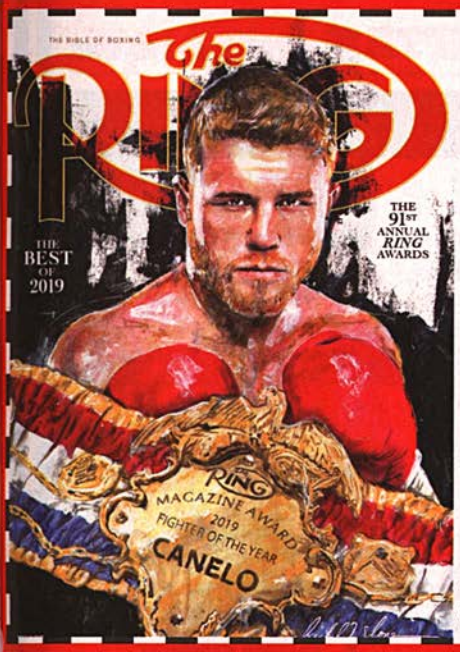
- **C** **SHAKUR STEVENSON** RING, WBC, WBO
  U.S. • 18-0-0 (9 KOs)
- **1** **OSCAR VALDEZ**
  Mexico • 30-1-0 (23 KOs)
- **2** **JAMEL HERRING**
  U.S. • 23-3-0 (11 KOs)
- **3** **SHAVKATDZHON RAKHIMOV**
  Russia • 16-0-1 (13 KOs)
- **4** **ROGER GUTIERREZ** WBA
  Venezuela • 26-3-1 (20 KOs)
- **5** **ROBSON CONCEICAO**
  Brazil • 17-1-0 (8 KOs)
- **6** **KENICHI OGAWA** IBF
  Japan • 26-1-1 (18 KOs)
- **7** **O'SHAQUIE FOSTER**
  U.S. • 19-2-0 (11 KOs)
- **8** **HECTOR GARCIA**
  Dom. Rep. • 15-0-0 (10 KOs)
- **9** **SAMIR ZIANI**
  France • 33-3-1 (8 KOs)
- **10** **EDUARDO RAMIREZ**
  Mexico • 26-2-3 (12 KOs)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 POUNDS

- **C** (VACANT)
- **1** **EMANUEL NAVARRETE** WBO
  Mexico • 35-1-0 (29 KOs)
- **2** **MARK MAGSAYO** WBC
  Phil. • 24-0-0 (16 KOs)
- **3** **MAURICIO LARA**
  Mexico • 24-2-1 (17 KOs)
- **4** **JOSH WARRINGTON** IBF
  U.K. • 31-1-1 (8 KOs)
- **5** **LEIGH WOOD** WBA
  U.K. • 26-2-0 (16 KOs)
- **6** **GARY RUSSELL JR.**
  U.S. • 31-2-0 (18 KOs)
- **7** **KIKO MARTINEZ**
  Spain • 43-11-2 (30 KOs)
- **8** **KID GALAHAD**
  U.K. • 28-2-0 (17 KOs)
- **9** **JOET GONZALEZ**
  U.S. • 25-2-0 (15 KOs)
- **10** **MICHAEL CONLAN**
  Ireland • 16-1-0 (8 KOs)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 POUNDS

- **C** (VACANT)
- **1** **STEPHEN FULTON** WBC, WBO
  U.S. • 20-0-0 (8 KOs)
- **2** **MURODJON AKHMADALIEV** IBF, WBA
  Uzbekistan • 10-0-0 (7 KOs)
- **3** **DANIEL ROMAN**
  U.S. • 29-3-1 (10 KOs)
- **4** **BRANDON FIGUEROA**
  U.S. • 22-1-1 (17 KOs)
- **5** **ANGELO LEO**
  U.S. • 21-1-0 (9 KOs)
- **6** **RA'EESE ALEEM**
  U.S. • 19-0-0 (12 KOs)
- **7** **AZAT HOVHANNISYAN**
  Armenia • 21-3-0 (17 KOs)
- **8** **RONNY RIOS**
  U.S. • 33-3-0 (16 KOs)
- **9** **MARLON TAPALES**
  Phil. • 35-3-0 (18 KOs)
- **10** **LUIS NERY**
  Mexico • 32-1-0 (24 KOs)



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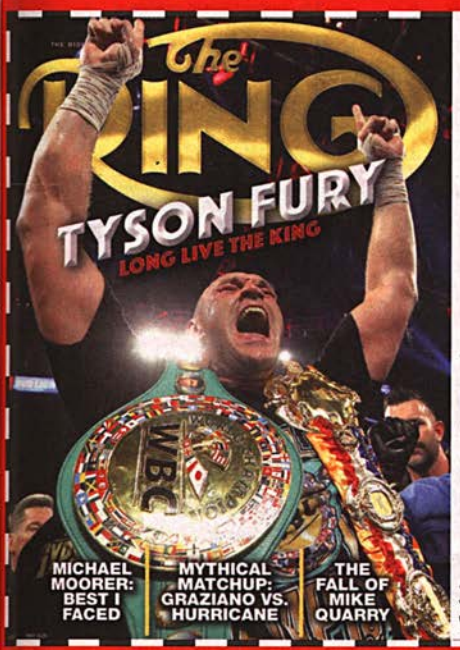

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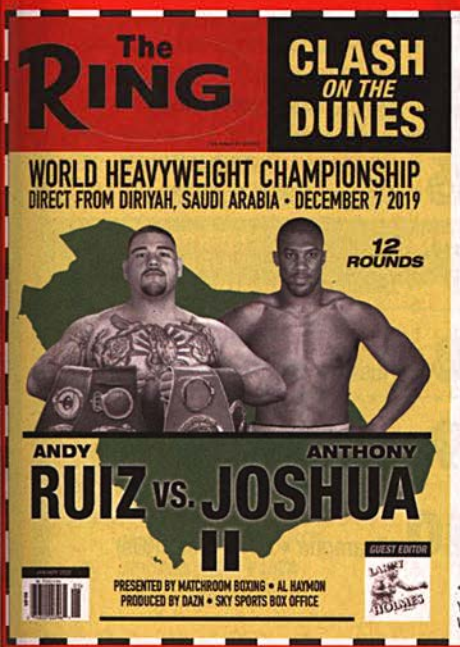

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RATINGS

Through fights of May 7, 2022

BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 POUNDS

- C **NAOYA INOUE** RING, IBF, WBA
  Japan • 22-0-0 (19 KOs)
- 1 **NONITO DONAIRE** WBC
  Phil. • 42-6-0 (28 KOs)
- 2 **JOHN RIEL CASIMERO**
  Phil. • 31-4-0 (21 KOs)
- 3 **EMMANUEL RODRIGUEZ**
  Puerto Rico • 20-2-0 (13 KOs)
- 4 **JASON MOLONEY**
  Australia • 23-2-0 (18 KOs)
- 5 **TAKUMA INOUE**
  Japan • 15-1-0 (3 KOs)
- 6 **RAU'SHEE WARREN**
  U.S. • 19-3-0 (5 KOs)
- 7 **GARY ANTONIO RUSSELL**
  U.S. • 19-0-0 (12 KOs)
- 8 **LEE MCGREGOR**
  U.K. • 11-0-1 (9 KOs)
- 9 **VINCENT ASTROLABIO**
  Phil. • 17-3-0 (12 KOs)
- 10 **PAUL BUTLER** WBO
  U.K. • 34-2-0 (15 KOs)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 POUNDS

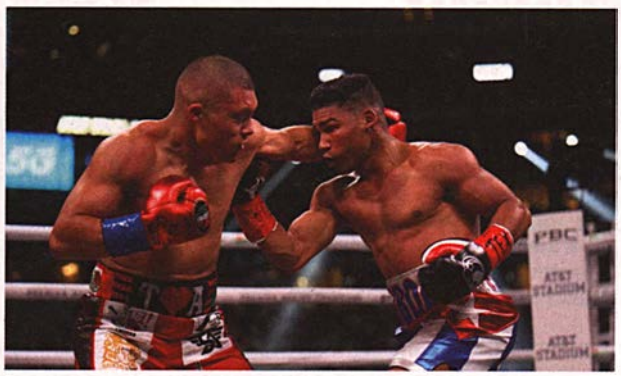
- C **JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA** RING, WBA
  Mexico • 42-3-0 (28 KOs)
- 1 **SRISAKET SOR RUNGVISAI**
  Thailand • 50-5-1 (43 KOs)
- 2 **ROMAN GONZALEZ**
  Nicaragua • 51-3-0 (41 KOs)
- 3 **KAZUTO IOKA** WBO
  Japan • 28-2-0 (15 KOs)
- 4 **FERNANDO MARTINEZ** IBF
  Argentina • 14-0-0 (8 KOs)
- 5 **JOSHUA FRANCO**
  U.S. • 18-1-2 (8 KOs)
- 6 **JESSE RODRIGUEZ** WBC
  Mexico • 15-0-0 (10 KOs)
- 7 **FRANCISCO RODRIGUEZ JR.**
  Mexico • 35-5-1 (25 KOs)
- 8 **JERWIN ANCAJAS**
  Phil. • 33-2-2 (22 KOs)
- 9 **DONNIE NIETES**
  Phil. • 43-1-6 (23 KOs)
- 10 **ANDREW MOLONEY**
  Australia • 23-2-0 (15 KOs)

FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 POUNDS

- C **(VACANT)**
- 1 **JUNTO NAKATANI** WBO
  Japan • 23-0-0 (18 KOs)
- 2 **JULIO CESAR MARTINEZ** WBC
  Mexico • 18-2-0 (14 KOs)
- 3 **SUNNY EDWARDS** IBF
  U.K. • 18-0-0 (4 KOs)
- 4 **ARTEM DALAKIAN** WBA
  Ukraine • 21-0-0 (15 KOs)
- 5 **RICARDO SANDOVAL**
  U.S. • 20-1-0 (15 KOs)
- 6 **MORUTI MTHALANE**
  S. Africa • 39-3-0 (26 KOs)
- 7 **MCWILLIAMS ARROYO**
  Puerto Rico • 21-4-0 (16 KOs)
- 8 **ANGEL AYALA LARDIZABAL**
  Mexico • 14-0-0 (6 KOs)
- 9 **JACKSON CHAUKE**
  S. Africa • 20-1-2 (14 KOs)
- 10 **CRISTOFER ROSALES**
  Nicaragua • 32-6-0 (21 KOs)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 POUNDS

- C **HIROTO KYOGUCHI** RING, WBA
  Japan • 15-0-0 (10 KOs)
- 1 **KENSHIRO TERAJI** WBC
  Japan • 19-1-0 (11 KOs)
- 2 **FELIX ALVARADO** IBF
  Nicaragua • 37-2-0 (32 KOs)
- 3 **JONATHAN GONZALEZ** WBO
  Puerto Rico • 25-3-1 (14 KOs)
- 4 **JESSE RODRIGUEZ**
  U.S. • 15-0-0 (10 KOs)
- 5 **ELWIN SOTO**
  Mexico • 19-2-0 (13 KOs)
- 6 **HEKKIE BUDLER**
  S. Africa • 33-4-0 (10 KOs)
- 7 **MASAMICHI YABUKI**
  Japan • 13-4-0 (12 KOs)
- 8 **ESTEBAN BERMUDEZ**
  Mexico • 14-3-2 (10 KOs)
- 9 **DANIEL MATELLON**
  Cuba • 12-0-2 (6 KOs)
- 10 **SIVENATHI NONTSHINGA**
  S. Africa • 10-0-0 (9 KOs)



The once-fearsome Yuriorkis Gamboa (right) was no match for young lightweight bull Isaac Cruz, who scored a fifth-round knockout.

STRAWWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 POUNDS

- C **(VACANT)**
- 1 **KNOCKOUT CP FRESHMART** WBA
  Thailand • 23-0-0 (9 KOs)
- 2 **PETCHMANEE CP FRESHMART** WBC
  Thailand • 38-1-0 (23 KOs)
- 3 **WANHENG MENAYOTHIN**
  Thailand • 55-2-0 (19 KOs)
- 4 **MASATAKA TANIGUCHI** WBO
  Japan • 16-3-0 (11 KOs)
- 5 **WILFREDO MENDEZ**
  Puerto Rico • 17-2-0 (6 KOs)
- 6 **RENE MARK CUARTO** IBF
  Phil. • 20-2-2 (11 KOs)
- 7 **PEDRO TADURAN**
  Phil. • 14-4-1 (11 KOs)
- 8 **GINJIRO SHIGEOKA**
  Japan • 7-0-0 (5 KOs)
- 9 **ERICK ROSA**
  Dom. Rep. • 5-0-0 (1 KO)
- 10 **VIC SALUDAR**
  Phil. • 21-5-0 (11 KOs)

HOW OUR RATINGS ARE COMPILED
RECORDS PROVIDED BY BOXREC.COM

Championship vacancies can be filled in the following two ways: 1. The Ring's Nos. 1 and 2 contenders fight one another. 2. If the Nos. 1 and 2 contenders choose not to fight one another and No. 1 fights No. 3, that matchup could be for the Ring title if the Editorial Board deems No. 3 worthy.

A champion can lose his belt in six situations: 1. The Champion loses a fight in the weight class in which he is champion; 2. The Champion moves to another weight class; 3. The Champion does not schedule a fight in any weight class for 18 months, although injuries and certain other unforeseen circumstances could be taken into consideration; 4. The Champion does not schedule a fight at his championship weight for 18 months (even if he fights at another weight); 5. The Champion does not schedule a fight with a Top-5 contender from any weight class for two years; 6. The Champion retires.

The Ring Editorial Board considers input from the Ratings Panel of boxing journalists from around the world and then decides collectively what changes will be made. That applies to both the pound-for-pound and divisional ratings.

P4P

1. **OLEKSANDR USYK**
   Ukraine • 19-0-0 (13 KOs)
2. **TERENCE CRAWFORD**
   U.S. • 38-0-0 (29 KOs)
3. **NAOYA INOUE**
   Japan • 22-0-0 (19 KOs)
4. **ERROL SPENCE JR.**
   U.S. • 28-0-0 (22 KOs)
5. **JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA**
   Mexico • 42-3-0 (28 KOs)
6. **CANELO ALVAREZ**
   Mexico • 57-2-2 (39 KOs)
7. **VASILIY LOMACHENKO**
   Ukraine • 16-2-0 (11 KOs)
8. **DMITRY BIVOL**
   Russia • 20-0-0 (11 KOs)
9. **JOSH TAYLOR**
   U.K. • 19-0-0 (13 KOs)
10. **ROMAN GONZALEZ**
    Nicaragua • 51-3-0 (41 KOs)

WOMEN'S RATINGS

Through fights of May 7, 2022

POUND FOR POUND

1 **KATIE TAYLOR**
Ireland • 21-0-0 (6 KOs)

2 **CLARESSA SHIELDS**
U.S. • 12-0-0 (2 KOs)

3 **AMANDA SERRANO**
Puerto Rico • 42-2-1 (30 KOs)

4 **MIKAELA MAYER**
U.S. • 17-0-0 (5 KOs)

5 **JESSICA MCCASKILL**
U.S. • 11-2-0 (4 KOs)

6 **DELFINE PERSOON**
Belgium • 46-3-0 (19 KOs)

7 **CHANTELLE CAMERON**
U.K. • 15-0-0 (8 KOs)

8 **SENIESA ESTRADA**
U.S. • 22-0-0 (9 KOs)

9 **SAVANNAH MARSHALL**
U.K. • 12-0-0 (10 KOs)

10 **CECILIA BRAEKHUS**
Norway • 36-2-0 (9 KOs)

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 POUNDS

C **FRANCHON CREWS-DEZURN** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO
U.S. • 8-1-0 (2 KOs)
1 **ELIN CEDERROOS**
Sweden • 8-1-0 (4 KOs)
2 **CHRISTINA HAMMER**
Germany • 28-1-0 (13 KOs)
3 **EMA KOZIN**
Slovenia • 21-1-1 (11 KOs)
4 **SHADASIA GREEN**
U.S. • 9-0-0 (8 KOs)
5 **JANINA NEUMANN**
Germany • 5-0-0 (5 KOs)

MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 POUNDS

C **CLARESSA SHIELDS** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC
U.S. • 12-0-0 (2 KOs)
1 **SAVANNAH MARSHALL** WBO
U.K. • 12-0-0 (10 KOs)
2 **CHRISTINA HAMMER**
Germany • 28-1-0 (13 KOs)
3 **EMA KOZIN**
Slovenia • 21-1-1 (11 KOs)
4 **FEMKE HERMANS**
Belgium • 12-4-0 (5 KOs)
5 **RAQUEL MILLER**
U.S. • 11-0-0 (4 KOs)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 POUNDS

C **CLARESSA SHIELDS** RING
U.S. • 12-0-0 (2 KOs)
1 **MARIE EVE DICAIRE**
Canada • 18-1-0 (1 KO)
2 **PATRICIA BERGHULT** WBC
Sweden • 15-0-0 (3 KOs)
3 **HANNAH RANKIN** WBA
U.K. • 11-5-0 (2 KOs)
4 **NATASHA JONAS** WBO
U.K. • 11-2-1 (8 KOs)
5 **CHRIS NAMUS**
Uruguay • 25-7-0 (8 KOs)

WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 POUNDS

C **JESSICA MCCASKILL** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO
U.S. • 11-2-0 (4 KOs)
1 **CECILIA BRAEKHUS**
Norway • 36-2-0 (9 KOs)
2 **LAYLA MCCARTER**
U.S. • 45-13-5 (11 KOs)
3 **VICTORIA BUSTOS**
Argentina • 23-6-0 (0 KOs)
4 **LOLITA MUZEYA**
Zambia • 17-1-0 (9 KOs)
5 **EWA PIATKOWSKA**
Poland • 16-1-0 (4 KOs)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 POUNDS

C **CHANTELLE CAMERON** RING, IBF, WBC
U.K. • 15-0-0 (8 KOs)
1 **ERICA FARIAS**
Argentina • 27-5-0 (10 KOs)
2 **KALI REIS** WBA, WBO
U.S. • 19-7-1 (5 KOs)
3 **MARY MCGEE**
U.S. • 27-4-0 (15 KOs)
4 **ANAHI SANCHEZ**
Argentina • 20-5-0 (12 KOs)
5 **OSHIN DERIEUW**
Belgium • 15-0-0 (6 KOs)

LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 POUNDS

C **KATIE TAYLOR** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO
Ireland • 21-0-0 (6 KOs)
1 **AMANDA SERRANO**
Puerto Rico • 42-2-1 (30 KOs)
2 **DELFINE PERSOON**
Belgium • 46-3-0 (19 KOs)
3 **ESTELLE MOSSELY**
Belgium • 10-0-0 (1 KOs)
4 **MIRIAM GUTIERREZ**
Spain • 14-2-0 (5 KOs)
5 **TERRI HARPER**
U.K. • 12-1-1 (6 KOs)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 POUNDS

C **MIKAELA MAYER** RING, IBF, WBO
U.S. • 17-0-0 (5 KOs)
1 **DELFINE PERSOON**
Belgium • 46-3-0 (19 KOs)
2 **ALYCIA BAUMGARDNER** WBC
U.S. • 12-1-0 (7 KOs)
3 **MAIVA HAMADOUCHE**
France • 22-2-0 (18 KOs)
4 **HYUN MI CHOI** WBA
South Korea • 19-0-1 (5 KOs)
5 **JENNIFER HAN**
U.S. • 18-5-1 (1 KO)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **AMANDA SERRANO** WBC, WBO
Puerto Rico • 42-2-1 (30 KOs)
2 **ERIKA CRUZ HERNANDEZ** WBA
Mexico • 14-1-0 (3 KOs)
3 **SARAH MAHFOUD**
Denmark • 11-0-0 (3 KOs)
4 **JELENA MRDJENOVICH**
Canada • 41-11-2 (19 KOs)
5 **ELINA TISSEN**
Germany • 25-2-0 (6 KOs)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **JACKIE NAVA**
Mexico • 39-4-4 (16 KOs)
2 **DINA THORSLUND**
Denmark • 18-0-0 (7 KOs)
3 **SEGOLENE LEFEBVRE** WBO
France • 16-0-0 (1 KO)
4 **YAMILETH MERCADO** WBC
Mexico • 19-3-0 (5 KOs)
5 **MAUREEN SHEA**
U.S. • 30-2-1 (13 KOs)

BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **DINA THORSLUND** WBO
Denmark • 18-0-0 (7 KOs)
2 **YULIHAN LUNA AVILA** WBC
Mexico • 22-3-1 (4 KOs)
3 **MARIANA JUAREZ**
Mexico • 55-11-4 (19 KOs)
4 **ZULINA MUNOZ**
Mexico • 53-4-2 (30 KOs)
5 **EBANIE BRIDGES** IBF
Australia • 8-1-0 (3 KOs)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **LOURDES JUAREZ** WBC
Mexico • 33-2-0 (4 KOs)
2 **GUADALUPE MARTINEZ**
Mexico • 19-10-0 (6 KOs)
3 **YESSICA CHAVEZ**
Mexico • 32-5-3 (4 KOs)
4 **DIANA FERNANDEZ**
Mexico • 24-4-1 (4 KOs)
5 **ADELAIDA RUIZ**
U.S. • 11-0-1 (6 KOs)

FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 POUNDS

C **MARLEN ESPARZA** RING, WBA, WBC
U.S. • 12-1-0 (1 KOs)
1 **NAOKO FUJIOKA**
Japan • 19-3-1 (7 KOs)
2 **ARELY MUCINO** WBO
Mexico • 31-3-2 (11 KOs)
3 **IBETH ZAMORA**
Mexico • 32-7-0 (12 KOs)
4 **GABRIELA ALANIZ**
Argentina • 12-0-0 (4 KOs)
5 **LEONELA YUDICA** IBF
Argentina • 17-0-3 (0 KOs)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **SENIESA ESTRADA**
U.S. • 22-0-0 (9 KOs)
2 **EVELYN BERMUDEZ** IBF, WBO
Argentina • 16-0-1 (6 KOs)
3 **KIM CLAVEL**
Canada • 15-0-0 (3 KOs)
4 **TSUNAMI TENKAI**
Japan • 28-13-1 (16 KOs)
5 **JESSICA NERY PLATA**
Mexico • 28-2-0 (3 KOs)

STRAWWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **SENIESA ESTRADA** WBA
U.S. • 22-0-0 (9 KOs)
2 **CHRISTINA RUPPRECHT** WBC
Germany • 11-0-1 (3 KOs)
3 **YOKASTA VALLE** IBF
Nicaragua • 24-2-0 (9 KOs)
4 **ANABEL ORTIZ**
Mexico • 31-5-0 (4 KOs)
5 **THI THU NHI NGUYEN** WBO
Vietnam • 5-0-0 (1 KO)

ATOMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 102 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **MONSERRAT ALARCON** WBA
Mexico • 17-4-2 (0 KOs)
2 **FABIANA BYTYQI** WBC
Czech Rep. • 19-0-1 (5 KOs)
3 **AYAKA MIYAO** IBF
Japan • 25-9-2 (6 KOs)
4 **ERI MATSUDA**
Japan • 4-1-1 (1 KO)
5 **NANAE SUZUKI** WBO
Japan • 11-4-1 (1 KO)

KATIE TAYLOR AND **AMANDA SERRANO** WERE UNDER HIGH PRE-FIGHT PRESSURE TO TAKE WOMEN'S BOXING TO A NEW LEVEL – AND INCREDIBLY, THEY PRODUCED A CLASSIC THAT SURPASSED ALL EXPECTATIONS

By Thomas Gerbasi

GAME. CHANGED.

There was a moment in the lead-up to the Katie Taylor-Amanda Serrano bout when Serrano trainer Jordan Maldonado recalled a conversation with his sister-in-law about fights that test the body and soul and everything in between.

"As crazy as it sounds, every time she (Serrano) sees a fight like that, she's like, 'Oh my God, I don't know, I gotta be crazy, but I want a fight like that.'"

On April 30, Serrano got her wish, teaming with Taylor to not only deliver one of the best fights of 2022, but perhaps the greatest of all time in women's boxing.

And the timing was perfect, as the much-maligned sweeter science never had the platform or attention it did at Madison Square Garden in New York City on

MELINA PIZANO/MATCHROOM

Taylor celebrates with trainer Ross Enamait and promoter Eddie Hearn.

this spring night. The word "history" was thrown around liberally in the weeks before the fight for Taylor's undisputed lightweight title, and rightfully so, as there were many firsts for the friendly rivals, not the least of which was that this was the first women's bout to headline "the mecca of boxing" and the first time two female combatants would each receive a seven-figure payday.

That was important, and the 19,187 fans that packed the Garden responded in kind to be a part of something special. But would it be a one-off or the start of something that would benefit all female boxers? According to Nakisa Bidarian of Most Valuable Promotions, the company he founded with social media influencer and budding pro boxer Jake Paul, that was up to the fighters.

"I think there's a lot riding on their shoulders," said Bidarian, who promotes Serrano, before the fight. "And what I mean by that is Ronda Rousey helped revolutionize women's MMA by being an exciting, marketable athlete. And from that point on, women's MMA I don't think has gotten to the level of popularity that she drove it to be, but it's been a very consistent part of mixed martial arts. And I think it's upon Katie and Amanda to put on a spectacular show, and that will only continue this evolution of interest in the sport as it relates to women. Not to put pressure on them, but they're gonna have all the lights on them. There's gonna be more people watching than ever before in a women's boxing event, and if they prove that their quality of product is as good as any other sporting event, absolutely I think there will be many more to come.

"This is a content business," he continued. "It's like you're producing a movie. It's a movie that has an unknown outcome. But people have to have interest in watching the movie to command the kind of dollars that we're commanding here. How well do critics receive this movie? And is there a demand for a sequel or other variations of this movie?"

Ten rounds later, Taylor and Serrano had delivered the boxing equivalent of a Hollywood blockbuster, a moment in time that had everyone transfixed from the time the pair left their locker rooms.

"I think even walking to the ring that night I knew this was something very, very special," Taylor told The Ring six days after she retained her titles via split decision. "It was clear from the buildup and all the interest how big the fight was, but to walk into that atmosphere and see all the Irish and Puerto Rican flags at a sold-out Madison Square Garden was incredible. There is so much history in that building, so for the fight to be as good as it was just made it the most special moment of my career to date."

"This is crazy," said Serrano as the combatants received their final instructions in the middle of the ring from referee Michael Griffin. Taylor, game face firmly engaged, even broke

into a slight smile in agreement, knowing that Serrano was spot-on in her assessment of the fight-night atmosphere. Irish fans and Puerto Rican fans alternated cheers and boos, chants and songs, combining to produce a deafening roar.

"I don't think I have the words to describe it," said Taylor. "It was an unbelievable experience from start to finish and I'm so grateful for all the Irish fans who showed up. The support was truly overwhelming."

The crazy was just beginning.

Serrano, a featherweight champion jumping up two weight classes to challenge for the 135-pound crown, stalked the bigger fighter with no regard for what was going to come back at her. Taylor boxed in a disciplined fashion, using her movement and crisp counters to build an early lead.

"Use the whole ring and you can box like that all night," Taylor's trainer, Ross Enamait, told her after the first round.

As for Taylor's perspective, there were no surprises from Serrano.

"Not really. I knew coming in this was going to be a very tough fight and a career-defining one for me," she said. "I knew I had put in the work in training camp so I'm always confident in my fitness and conditioning to do whatever it takes to secure victory. I had a great camp, great sparring, and Ross had the perfect game plan. So I was ready for whatever she was going to bring."

By the third round, though, what Serrano was bringing was beginning to become an issue for Taylor. The champion has been known to abandon game plans to get into a brawl, and against the Puerto Rican, who ended 30 of her 42 pro wins by knockout, that can be a problem.

So as Taylor's punches got wilder, Serrano's sharper shots to the head and body started paying dividends, and the crowd erupted, getting so loud that as the bell ended the third stanza, Griffin didn't hear it.

The 35-year-old Taylor found her rhythm again in the fourth as she ripped off combinations in the middle of the ring but went back to her corner with a cut over her left eye.

Then came Round 5, which started calmly enough. There were exchanges in which Taylor made Serrano miss and pay. Serrano adjusted by digging punches to the body, and when she moved back upstairs, she stunned Taylor with a little over a minute left. And then she stunned the Irish superstar again ... and again. Victory appeared to be imminent for Serrano, especially when Taylor's response to the onslaught was to abandon any self-preservation and simply throw back, but the bell intervened. The champion still looked dazed between rounds.

"I don't think I was as hurt as some people think in that round," said Taylor. "She is obviously a good puncher, like her record suggests, but

Serrano hurt and bloodied Taylor like no previous foe ever had.

Taylor-Serrano became a battle of wills and hearts by the middle rounds, and neither woman would back down.

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Sarah Stier

SARAH STIER

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I was never hurt in there and I have a very good chin. Of course, it wasn't a good round for me, but I just had to regroup, reset and get back to the game plan, and I think I did that in the next round."

She did. The 33-year-old Serrano continued to march forward, but Taylor coolly responded and landed counters that took her off the edge of the cliff and back into the fight. Down the stretch, Taylor's mode went from survive to thrive. But just when it seemed like she regained control of the action, Round 10 arrived. And as is Taylor's nature, she decided to slug with Serrano and her knee nearly hit the canvas in the closing seconds of the epic battle. I asked her how many years these moments of recklessness have taken off of Enamait's life.

"I think Ross is used to that by now," Taylor laughed. "I'm never afraid to have a tear-up. I love to stand and have a fight even if it's not the smartest thing to do sometimes, but you just get caught up in the moment and want to go toe-to-toe with your opponent. I knew coming into this fight that there would be times when I would have to dig deep and go into the trenches, but I enjoy that. You can't be a great fighter unless you have the heart of a champion, and over the years I think I've shown I have that."

She has. From the time she first put on the gloves, pretending to be a boy to get amateur bouts, the County Wicklow native has been all fighter. The same goes for Serrano, who didn't have the amateur pedigree of her opponent but instead earned her stripes on the regional pro circuit, fighting anyone and everyone en route to seven divisional world titles. When they finally met, the Olympic gold medalist from Ireland and the power puncher from Puerto Rico were more alike than different, kindred spirits willing to do whatever it took to win a prizefight. In short, they were the perfect representatives for a sport that had just received its rightful showcase, and in front of Hall of Famers Christy Martin, Laila Ali and Lady Tyger Trimiar, they did that sport proud.

All that was left was for David Diamante to read the judges' scorecards. Taylor was confident.

"My corner told me that I needed to win the championship rounds, and when the fight was over, I felt pretty confident I had done that," she said. "Of course, you can never tell how the judges are going to score a fight, so that's always a nervous wait, but I knew I had finished the fight strong."

Benoit Roussel, 96-94 Serrano.

Glenn Feldman, 97-93 Taylor.

Guido Cavalleri, 96-93 Taylor.

It was close. Some would say controversial. But Taylor's split decision victory, which improved her record to 21-0 with six knockouts, was no robbery. It was an instant classic between two fighters who are likely to meet again, possibly by the end of this year.

"I knew going into the fight I would have to produce a big performance because Amanda is a great champion and an amazing fighter, and I think we brought the best out of each other and gave people a fight to remember," said Taylor. "Obviously there was a lot of hype and buildup going into the fight, so it was great that it not only lived up to the expectations but exceeded them."

More importantly, Taylor and Serrano showed the class before, during and after the bout that set an example for the current and next generation of female fighters. That was worth a lot more than a pair of long overdue seven-figure paydays.

"I think we both elevated the sport and lifted it to a new level," said Taylor. "Over the years, both of us have broken down so many barriers to get to this point, and this fight will have inspired so many young girls. That's the most satisfying thing for me about this whole journey. Everyone talks about Ali and Frazier when it comes to boxing at Madison Square Garden, and now our fight will be included in those conversations as well for decades to come."

SARAH STIER

Taylor and Serrano were fierce during their epic fight but humble and gracious after.

THE REAL DEAL

DMITRY BIVOL'S IMPRESSIVE VICTORY OVER CANELO ALVAREZ BROUGHT THE STREAKING MEXICAN STAR BACK TO EARTH AND SHOWCASED THE RUSSIAN'S POTENTIAL TO ONE DAY RULE THE 175-POUND DIVISION

By Donald McRae

Above: Bivol entered the ring relaxed and confident despite Alvarez being a 5½-to-1 favorite.

Dmitry Bivol was already dreaming of flying home to St. Petersburg to be reunited with his wife and children after the greatest victory of his life so far when his opponent, Saul "Canelo" Alvarez, was asked how he might spend the next day. Alvarez had just been treated generously by the judges who decided he had lost narrowly to Bivol, 115-113 on all three scorecards, and he was in a philosophical mood late on a Saturday night in Las Vegas.

"Play golf, I think," he said. It would be the morning after only the second defeat of a professional career that stretches across 61 fights and 16½ years. Earlier in the week, as he prepared for his audacious bid to beat Bivol and become the new WBA light heavyweight titleholder, Canelo had spoken to a small group of media and reflected on his pro debut, as a junior welterweight at the age of 15, in Mexico in October 2005. He revealed that his fight purse had been just 800 pesos (less than $75 at the time) and that half of the amount had been paid to him in tickets, which he distributed to his "massive family."

Eight hundred pesos in hard cash offers a stark contrast to the $160 million Canelo will earn for his latest three-fight deal with DAZN. The first of these bouts, against Bivol, was meant to be an intriguing appetizer before the main event in September, when Canelo is due to face his bitter rival, Gennadiy Golovkin, for a third time. He also aims to fight again in December in either England or Mexico. All those grand plans were thrown into doubt by Bivol, who, in a boxing master class, was far too big, too strong and too composed for

Hennessy
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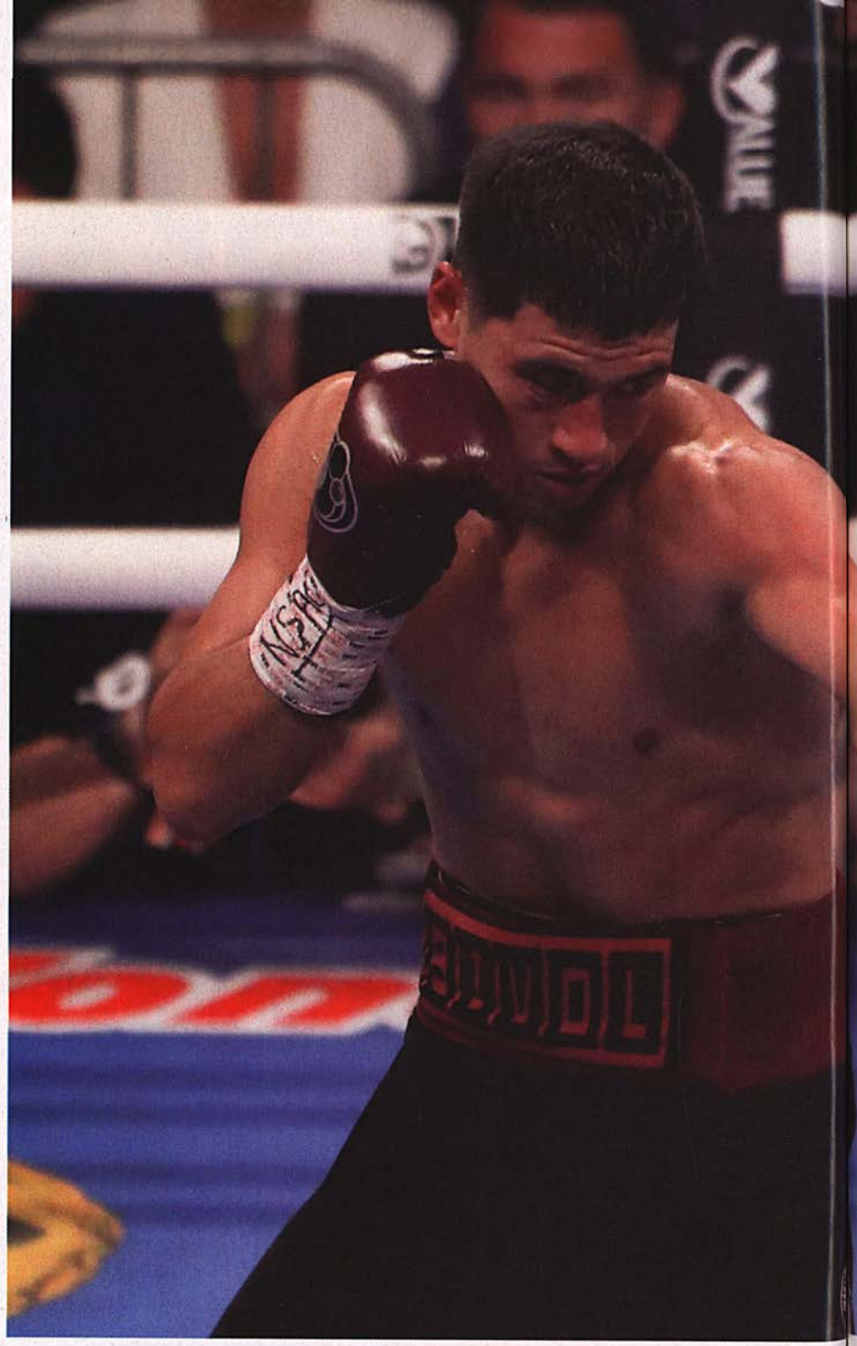
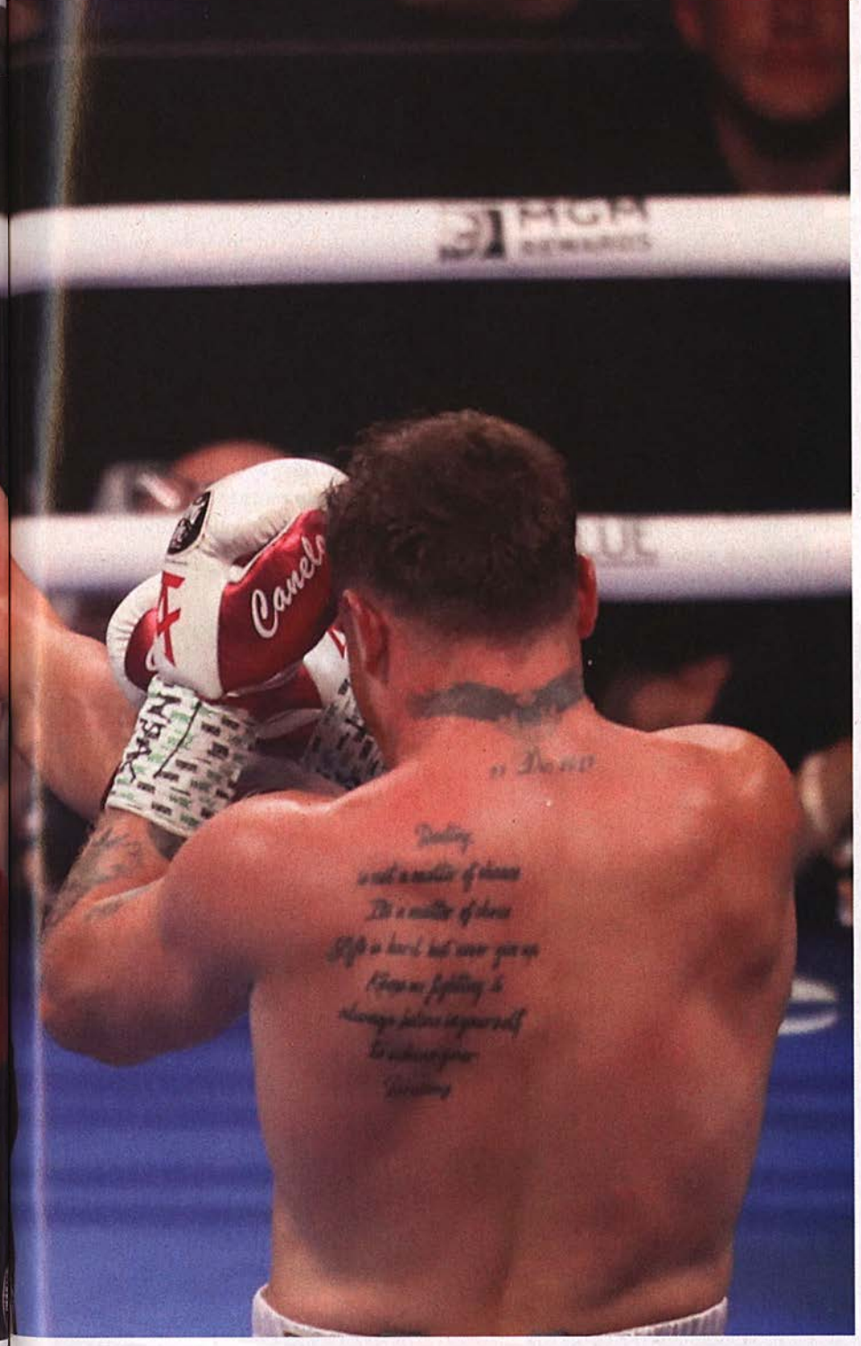
Never stop. Never
Canelo
BOXING IS LIFE
Hennessy
Hennessy
stop. Never settle.
WORLD BOXING ASSOCIATION
WBA





Though naturally bigger, Bivol beat Alvarez with skill, activity and smart tactics.

even the great Mexican.

"I proved myself today," Bivol said after a fight he had dominated so clearly that most media at ringside had him winning 118-110 or 117-111. "I'm sorry I broke your plans with Gennadiy Golovkin. Thank you, Canelo. He's a great champion and I respect him."

That respect had been apparent all week. Bivol had been asked repeatedly about his challenger and he was full of praise for Canelo. But the 31-year-old Russian also sounded calm and confident. He made it clear he had little fear of facing Canelo, and he told me he had felt more nervous before boxing the unheralded Craig Richards exactly a year earlier, in May 2021, in Manchester, England. "I had lots of nerves before Richards because I had not been in a fight for one-and-a-half years and I had forgotten those feelings," Bivol said. "Now that I remember these feelings, it's fine. I had another fight in December (when he beat Umar Salamov) and that helped me feel ready for Canelo."

He handled all the questions about Canelo with class and patience, and there was only a flash of emotion when he was asked if it hurt that so much talk had been expended on the Golovkin fight – as if Bivol was not even worthy of consideration. "Yes, of course," Bivol said, "but it doesn't matter. I'm just focused on my opportunity and on my fight."

The idea that he would be able to beat Canelo on points in Las Vegas, where the Mexican is always favored by the judges, especially on Cinco de Mayo weekend, seemed a stretch to even sympathetic observers. Bivol shrugged. "I am looking forward to Saturday night and I never think about judges," he said quietly. "I don't say, 'Oh, I'm in Vegas, against Canelo, everything is against me.' No.'"

Despite being the champion, Bivol had to bow to the might of Canelo's prestige and walk to the ring first. He was also introduced before the challenger, but he took it as his cue to be first all night. Bivol was first to the jab, and his fast and accurate combinations were so much more effective than the single power shots Canelo tried to land with only partial success. It was an insult to Bivol that all three judges gave the first four rounds to Canelo – and scarcely credible that the champion needed to win the 12th to secure his unanimous victory. He did so in imperious fashion and could afford to be laconic afterward.

When he was asked if the judges might have been trying to cheat him, Bivol recalled a moment when the media's pre-fight pessimism suddenly seemed more warranted, saying, "I was a little bit shocked when I heard 115-113. I thought, 'Maybe I lost today. I thought I won, but everything was against me today.'" He then took all the heat out of a loaded question: "Then, at the end, even Eddie Hearn (the promoter who backs Canelo) was congratulating me. He was smiling. He was happy for me – but not too much."

ICON SPORTSWIRE

Bivol was also asked at the post-fight press conference if he had some encouraging words for people dismissed as underdogs and outsiders. "I have a message for people who bet on me today, who won ..."

Bivol could not help himself. He broke out into loud and raucous laughter: "Congratulations, guys. ... But the people who didn't believe in me? It's just their opinion and I appreciate them. They believe in Canelo. It's normal. No problem."

He was just as relaxed when reflecting on a fight he had won so clearly. "I [expected] that he [would] punch me hard. I was ready. I tried to use my hands and my arms to block him, and then I [tried] to give him back when he's tired, because we had good sparring partners who are similar to Canelo. Of course I felt his power. He has really good speed, good power. I can throw some punches with power, but there are other fighters whose every punch is powerful. To be honest, I didn't feel that he had that power as a light heavyweight."

That last sentence was matched by the short answer he gave when asked if he could pinpoint the moment he felt he had gained control of the contest. "From the beginning," Bivol said coolly.

Bivol is still too modest to claim supremacy even in his own division. Insisting that he is merely "one of the best" light heavyweights in the world, Bivol said he will only fulfill his dream of becoming the king at 175 pounds when he holds all the belts. Before then, Canelo might trigger the rematch clause in their contract. Bivol shrugged again and said it was too soon for him to even think about how he might approach a second fight with Canelo.

He would surely welcome the rematch. Bivol would earn the biggest purse of his career by some distance and he would be heavily favored to once more take advantage of his greater height, weight, reach and power.

Canelo, of course, is a proud Mexican fighter, but initially even he couldn't dispute the outcome. In the ring, five minutes after the final bell, he reacted to his defeat with good grace. "You have to accept it. It's boxing," Canelo said, "He's a great champion. Sometimes in boxing, you win. Sometimes you lose. Not making excuses. I lost today and he won."

An hour later, in the basement of the T-Mobile Arena, Canelo put forward a different argument. "I'm not giving any excuses, but I do feel I won the fight. I think maybe I lost four or five rounds, but I definitely didn't lose the fight. I got a little bit tired toward the final rounds, but I felt good."

Pressed to reflect more deeply, Canelo admitted that "maybe the

weight was a slight issue and I didn't feel 100 percent ... but I'm always looking for difficult fights. I went up and looked for this difficult fight. I feel good at 168, but I'm always up for challenges. Tonight I was looking for greatness."

Canelo is a decent man in addition to being an outstanding champion who has won world titles at four different weights – including light heavyweight when he beat a faded Sergey Kovalev in 2019. But he faced a younger, fresher and more accomplished Russian in Bivol, who extended his record to a perfect 20-0. There were times when, with his face reddened and marked up, Canelo looked every bit a fighter who had endured three times as many bouts as his opponent.

"You have to give credit to Bivol; he's a very difficult fighter to hit," Canelo conceded. "But I'm very proud and I'm very competitive. I've gone up and fought at 175. I've gone out of my comfort zone and there's no shame in that. I'm looking for challenges that others would be scared to take on because they might lose. It's about those 50-50 fights that people want to see."

Asked if losing to Bivol hurt him as much as his only other defeat, to Floyd Mayweather in 2013, Canelo shook his head. "No, I don't feel that way. I feel I can come out of this fight with my head held high. I gave the best of me in a different weight class."

Special champions such as Canelo are always urged to move up in weight to test themselves against bigger men. When they fall short, they are often mocked and dismissed as overrated. It happened again after Canelo's defeat to Bivol, when Twitter was quick to launch a withering assault against his legacy. The fighter himself was more measured.

"My most comfortable weight is 168," Canelo said, "and that's where I feel best. We're going to see if we can take on this rematch. We'll talk about it and we'll let you know."

It was then that Canelo revealed that a round of golf on Sunday would be the best medicine for his painful defeat. But there was some of the old fire when he was asked if Bivol might emerge as his career-defining rival. "Could be," Canelo said, his eyes still blazing, before he stressed his belief that he will improve considerably.

"I always like to learn, and today I feel like I learned a lot. I'm going to show you this in upcoming fights. Boxing is like this. Sometimes you win and sometimes you lose, but always with your head held high. We will fight again and we will win again."

Perhaps his tranquil Sunday on the golf course would help Canelo reach a more practical decision. Fighting Bivol again might appeal to the instinct of a Mexican warrior, but it is surely wise that Canelo should return to the safer terrain of the super middleweight division, where his heavily hyped final bout in an abrasive trilogy with Golovkin

A vexed Alvarez nearly tried to body slam Bivol during a clinch in Round 11.

Bivol was the No. 2-rated light heavyweight but is now "the man" at 175 pounds.

makes so much more sense. They have unfinished business after Canelo was so fortunate to earn a draw in their first contest in 2017 before he won narrowly on points a year later. Golovkin is also 40 and he is now a much less threatening opponent than the implacable Bivol.

A day later, while Canelo walked along the pristine fairways and sank putts on the manicured greens, Bivol suggested that his "upset" victory was "better for boxing." He even floated an outrageous idea that he might be willing to go down to 168 pounds to meet Canelo on the Mexican's terms. But Bivol soon returned to his obvious preference of becoming the undisputed light heavyweight champion, which could mean an all-Russian showdown between him and the fearsome Artur Beterbiev (who was due to face Joe Smith Jr. on June 18 in a unification bout as we went to press). That contest would be as thrilling as it is intriguing.

But for now, Bivol can relax with his family in St. Petersburg. When I asked him earlier in fight week about Russia's invasion of Ukraine, he was understandably cautious in his reply. Bivol knows he cannot be seen to openly criticize Vladimir Putin, but he made a subtle and telling distinction when he pointed out that his father comes from Moldova while his mother, who is of Korean descent, was born in Kazakhstan and grew up in Kyrgyzstan. His parents met in Russia but they moved back to Kyrgyzstan.

"I was born there and lived there 11 years," Bivol said. "It's a great country. It's not a rich country, but it has great people, nice people. It's my motherland. A lot of my life afterward was in Russia, but I love Kyrgyzstan. I love the culture and it's different [from] Russia."

In the same way that he cherishes his layered identity, Bivol will savor his victory over Canelo. He also told me how deeply he understood the gravity of boxing, as his close friend, Maxim Dadashev, had died four days after a grinding battle in the ring against Subriel Matias in July 2019. "Maxim was my friend," Bivol said of the Russian junior welterweight. "I knew him since 2003 and we were on the same St. Petersburg team. He was a funny guy who always fought so hard. His wife is now living next to me [in St. Petersburg]. We invite his wife and his son to our house – like when my kids have a birthday."

When I asked how Elizaveta, Maxim's wife, was coping, Bivol looked briefly stricken. "For one year after his tragedy, she was crying every day. It's hard."

The pain Bivol expressed in that interview was very different from the elation he showed three nights later, after his landmark victory against Canelo. Bivol was full of laughter and joy. "I'm so happy," he said simply.

As they left the T-Mobile Arena, and moved to different parts of the world, it was obvious that the two great fighters would both try and forget about boxing for a little while. They deserved respite from the exhilarating challenges and brutal realities of the ring.

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A GUIDING LIGHTWEIGHT

SHAKUR STEVENSON HAS BEEN SO DOMINANT DURING HIS BRIEF TIME AT 130 POUNDS THAT HE IS NOW WIDELY EXPECTED TO WREAK HAVOC AT 135 AS WELL

By Tom Gray

Valdez was no match for Stevenson's talent, size and ring savvy.

It doesn't take long for the tide to change in boxing.

It seems like only yesterday that hard-to-please fight fans looked upon Shakur Stevenson as a cure for insomnia. Dominant decision wins over Christopher Diaz, Joet Gonzalez, Toka Kahn Clary and Jeremia Nakathila may have pleased the purist, but those looking for destructive and career-defining performances were sticking the knife in and twisting it before Stevenson had hit the showers.

Not anymore.

A brilliant junior lightweight title win over Jamel Herring (TKO 10) last October and a dominant showing against Oscar Valdez (UD 12) in their unification clash in April have taken Stevenson's reputation into the stratosphere. The latter triumph saw the Newark-born star add the Ring and WBC titles to his collection, and many insiders now include him among the finest pound-for-pound fighters in the world today. Stevenson's supremacy at 130 pounds is so obvious that he's now being encouraged to move north to lightweight in search of bigger game. However, Stevenson only made the move to 130 in June 2020 and he's had five fights at the weight. Fans are obviously enthused about the possibility of him punch-swapping with the likes of George Kambosos, Devin Haney, Vasiliy Lomachenko, Gervonta Davis and Ryan Garcia at 135 pounds, but not everyone is convinced it's the right time

Stevenson proposed to his girlfriend, Michelle Ragston (aka Young Lyric), after beating Valdez.

for Stevenson to move up.

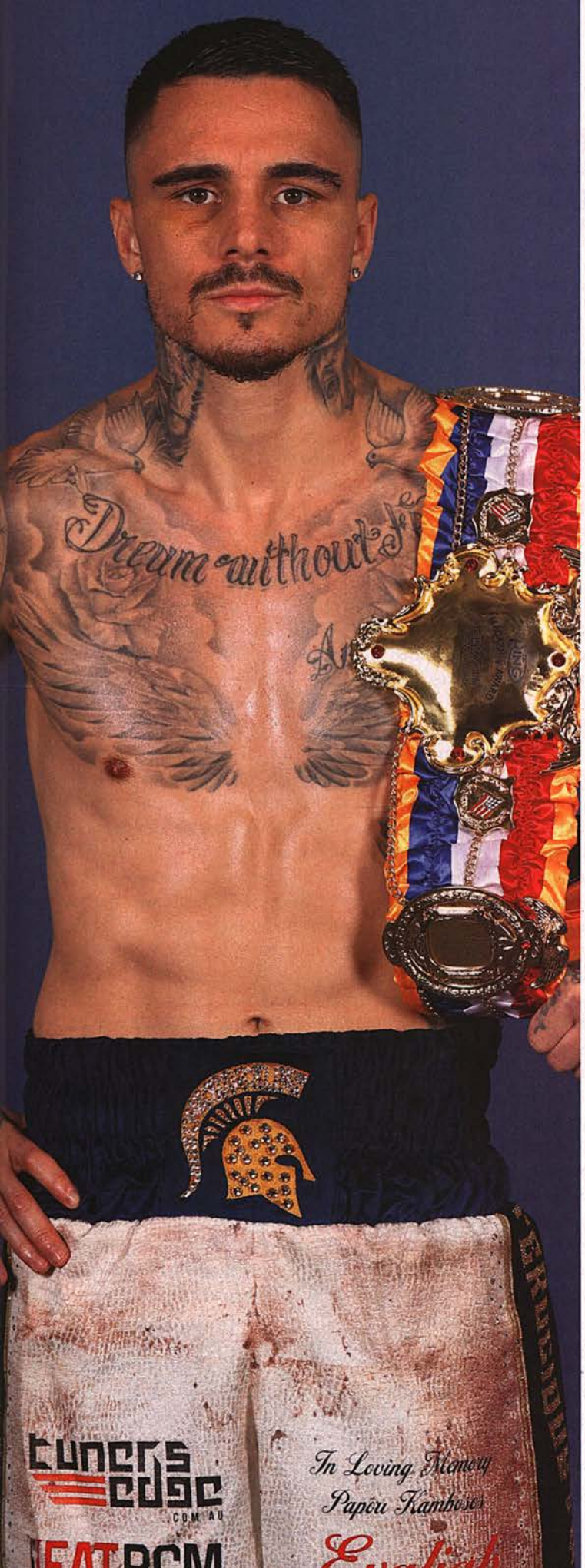
"He just got to 130 pounds," said Philadelphia-based trainer Stephen Edwards with a touch of frustration. "I think that too many fighters leave weight divisions too soon because of public demand and things like that. They end up losing what could be their peak performances. For example, I always thought Oscar De La Hoya left 140 pounds too quickly. He looked awesome at 140 pounds, and the first [Julio Cesar] Chavez fight was the best I ever seen him look.

"I don't understand all the pressure for Shakur Stevenson to leave 130 when he only has two [sanctioning body] belts and there's two other belts out there. It'll be easier to make 135, but he's a young guy, so he could fight two times in the next six months, get the other belts and then leave. If he doesn't, then someone will say he didn't fight this guy or he didn't fight that guy or he didn't [fully] unify."

Edwards is a historian and his point is well-made. Example: Brazilian great Eder Jofre would eventually claim a world title at featherweight, but he achieved greatness at bantamweight. Jofre dominated world-class 118-pounders for four years, achieved undisputed status and made seven total defenses. Sure, he lost to Fighting Harada twice, but if Jofre didn't hang around and mop up at 118 pounds, then he wouldn't be regarded as one of the finest bantamweights in boxing history. That's how you forge a legacy.

However, in the 21st century, the sport of boxing and those calling the shots move almost as fast as Stevenson's hands. While it would be a nice nod to tradition and history for him to pursue true and everlasting greatness at 130 pounds, the 18-0 Stevenson will likely be swayed by money and superstardom. Can we blame him? Not a chance. And one thing's for sure: Every hardcore boxing fan on the planet will be tuning in to see if he can take down the top players at lightweight.

The Ring now takes a look at potential matchups between Stevenson and the 135-pound elite:



GEORGE KAMBOSOS JR.

RECORD: 20-0 (10 KOs)
STATUS: RING, IBF, WBA AND WBO LIGHTWEIGHT CHAMPION

Kambosos burst onto the scene with a gutsy and determined 12-round split decision win over the previously unbeaten Teofimo Lopez in New York last November. The affable Australian dropped Lopez early, got off the floor himself and outhustled the reigning champion to claim a sensational triumph.

A year prior to that career-defining win, Kambosos faced Welshman Lee Selby in an IBF eliminator. Again it was a competitive encounter with Kambosos emerging as a 12-round split decision winner at the Wembley Arena in London.

"Kambosos has the ability to stop you punching because he always looks like he's ready to fire back with the right hand," said Selby, who once reigned as the IBF featherweight titleholder. "That's the way he made me feel. I wasn't really looking to let my right hand go, I was just boxing behind my jab, because it felt like if I did throw the right, it would leave me open for his right uppercut or the straight right."

And what does Selby make of Stevenson?

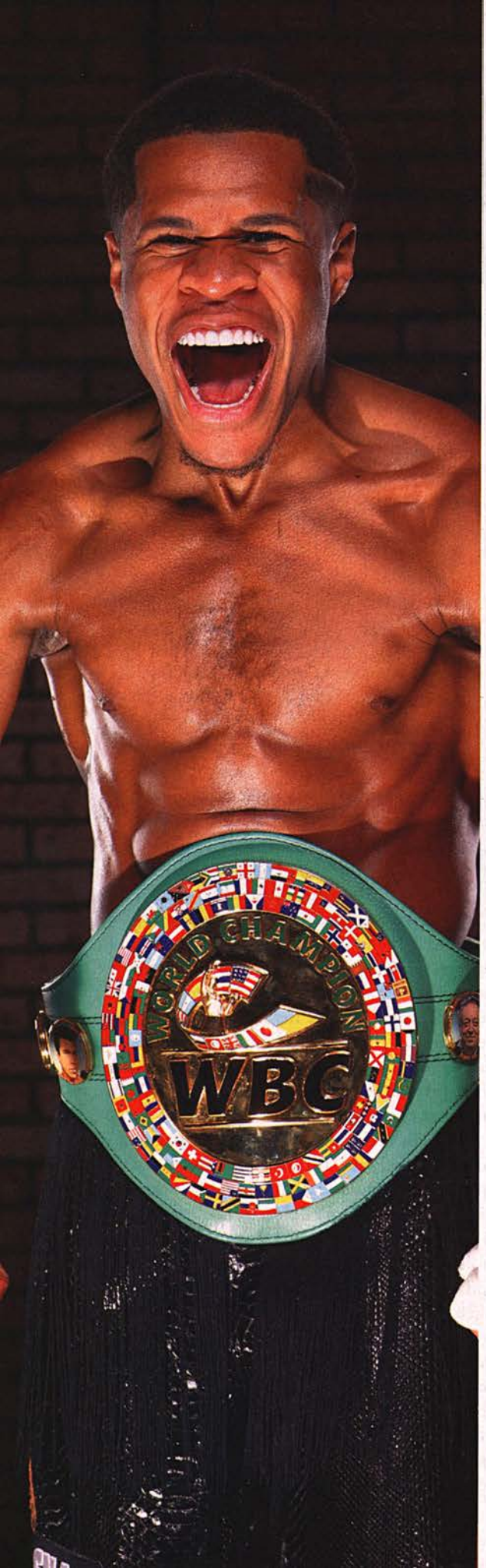
"I think he's very good," stated the former world titleholder in earnest. "I watched highlights of his fight against Valdez, who I shared many rounds of sparring with when both of us were in our prime. It was very good sparring, so I know how good Valdez is, but Stevenson beat him quite comfortably.

"Stevenson has a great boxing IQ. I rate him up there with the likes of Terence Crawford and Errol Spence. He keeps out of range, he's a nice boxer, he throws very sharp punches. I think he's the full package. Some of these top fighters ride on the back foot, up on their toes when they're in punching range, then they go from toe to heel and that keeps them just out of range. You can't see it when you're in the ring with them."

Before a Kambosos-Stevenson fight can even be discussed, the former has the small matter of a full undisputed championship fight against Haney, which is scheduled to take place on June 5 in Melbourne. Selby was noncommittal when it came to picking a winner for that fight, but he did say that Haney could struggle with traveling such a long distance and the effect that will have on his preparation.

If Kambosos were to come through against Haney and emerge as undisputed champion, would he have the right stuff to take down Stevenson?

"No, Stevenson wins," said Selby without a moment's hesitation. "I can't see anybody beating him. I think he beats them all at lightweight."



DEVIN HANEY

RECORD: 27-0 (15 KOs)
STATUS: WBC LIGHTWEIGHT TITLEHOLDER, RATED NO. 3 BY THE RING

Haney's ring moniker is "The Dream," and he has the chance to fulfill his own against Kambosos just after we go to press. Blessed with lightning speed and excellent skills, the sharpshooting 23-year-old was upgraded to full WBC titleholder in 2019 and has made four successful defenses. He's only encountered adversity on one occasion, when he was shaken up late by three-division world titleholder Jorge Linares.

"Haney throws a lot of combinations, he's very lengthy and he has good speed," acknowledged Jamel Herring. "He did get shaken up by Linares, but it's boxing, and the punches that hurt you are the ones you don't see. He recovered like a true champion, pushed forward and won that fight."

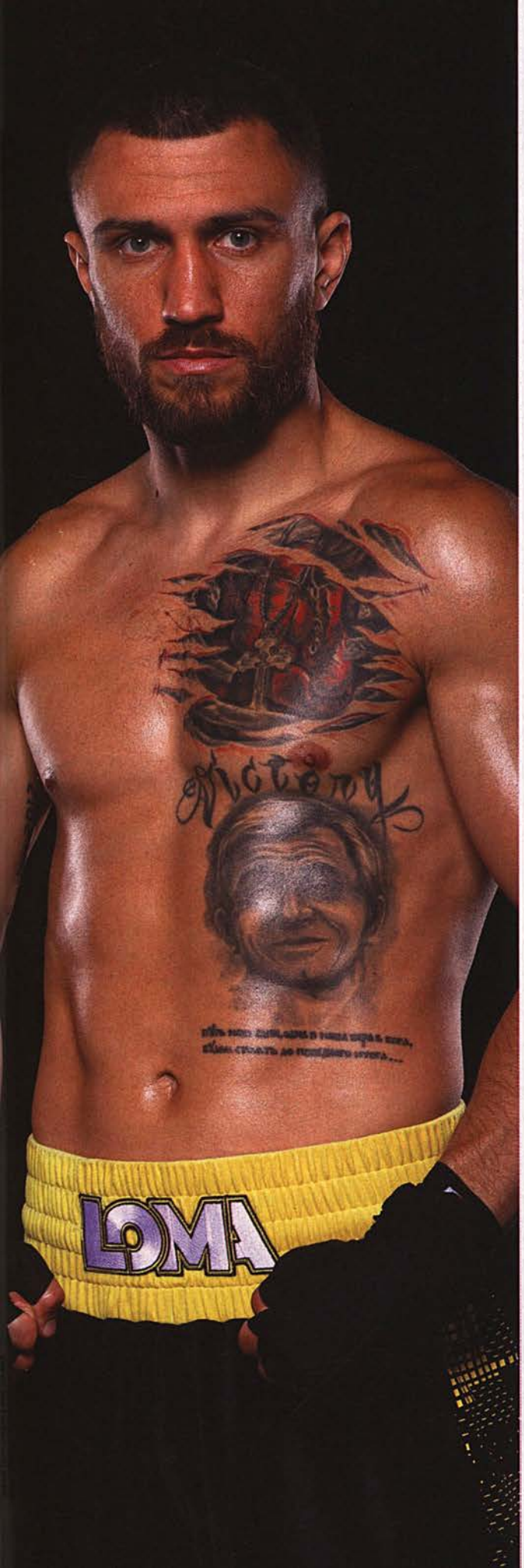
Despite displaying incredible bravery, Herring had very little success against Stevenson, who looked incredible when they squared off in Atlanta. It was The Ring's Performance of the Year for 2021, so if anyone is qualified to discuss the outstanding abilities that Stevenson possesses, it's the former Marine known as "Semper Fi."

"Shakur is very technical but, more importantly, it's his ring IQ that makes the big difference," he said. "You have a lot of guys that know how to fight defensively, but it's his hand-eye coordination [that makes him special]. He'll see little twitches and he's gone. Even when you look at what he's doing in slow motion, you'll see yourself throw with good speed and power, but he still gets out of the way. He picks up on the timing and then counters. And when he counters, he throws punches in bunches and that throws you off. The other thing I had issues with was even when I was defensive and had my guard up, he'd punch around the guard. He's really great at angles and turning the punches over where they break through just enough."

If Haney comes through against Kambosos, then a matchup with Stevenson for the undisputed championship would be a massive event. Politically, it might be difficult to make, but – if you can excuse the pun – we can all dream.

"I just think when you compare these two, you've got to lean toward Shakur based on competition level," stated Herring. "Stevenson is getting better with each fight. I'm not taking anything away from Haney, but we need to see more from him against the higher echelon-level fighters. The fight against Kambosos will show us where he's at, not only skill-wise but mentally. He's going into a big arena where he's not the A-side this time. Shakur welcomed the boos [when he fought Valdez in Las Vegas] and handled that very well. Boxing is 80 percent mental and 20 percent physical, and you have to be very tough.

"I don't think Shakur has any problems moving on to the lightweight division. It's not really the size [that matters], it's his technique. You have to hit the kid first. We haven't seen him shaken up or damaged in the slightest during his entire career, so you've got to hit the kid. If you can't hit him, then there's nothing to worry about on his end. I also believe he'll move on to the junior welterweight division."



A GUIDING LIGHTWEIGHT

VASILIY LOMACHENKO

RECORD: 16-2 (11 KOs)

STATUS: RATED NO. 2 BY THE RING

The most decorated fighter on this list is the great Lomachenko, who proved in his December demolition of Richard Commey that an upset loss to Teofimo Lopez did little to blunt his ambition or drive. The Ukrainian wizard turned in an electrifying performance at Madison Square Garden, dropping Commey in the seventh round on his way to a dominant unanimous decision win.

Former Olympic champion Luke Campbell challenged Lomachenko for an assortment of lightweight titles in August 2019. He lost a wide decision at the O2 Arena in London but asked questions of the three-weight world champ during the early rounds before Lomachenko adapted.

"My feet were important, but I could also match his feints and movement," recalled Campbell. "My mistake was committing with the [right] jab. Every time I committed with the jab, he timed me with a left hand to the body. I shouldn't have been committing to the jab, because he's small and compact. A couple of times I put a dent in him, but Lomachenko was definitely my hardest fight."

As we go to press, Lomachenko remains in his native Ukraine supporting his countrymen during the Russian invasion. To say boxing is secondary in these circumstances is an understatement, but if we are lucky enough to see him back in the ring, what can we expect in a potential showdown with Stevenson?

"Lomachenko is super-smart and he can make the best look ordinary," said Campbell. "Look what he just did to Commey. Commey is a good fighter – he can punch, he's a big lightweight, and Lomachenko played with him in every round. He was even waving the referee in because he was giving him that much of a beating.

"But Stevenson is a helluva fighter himself and he's hard to hit. He's certainly a better fighter than me. He probably hasn't got my punching power or my reach, but he's got other attributes that make up for that. I think it would be quite cagey actually – two southpaws – and they've sparred in the past. I think [Team Lomachenko] brought Stevenson in for one of their camps. Lomachenko will know what he's like in sparring and he'll know the things he does. They'll look at mistakes and they'll look at what he's doing right. They'll analyze that sparring tape and they're very smart. That's why Lomachenko has such a great boxing IQ – he studies people. I can see Lomachenko edging that fight right now."

Despite picking Lomachenko head-to-head, Campbell believes that Stevenson will eventually reign supreme.

"He's definitely going to be a pound-for-pounder," said Campbell, echoing the thoughts of just about everyone in the boxing business. "I think he's an unbelievable fighter. Moving up to lightweight, he's certainly got the mindset, the skill and everything else to beat them all."

GERVONTA DAVIS

RECORD: 26-0 (24 KOS)
STATUS: RATED NO. 4 BY THE RING

What a fight this would be.

Gervonta "Tank" Davis is arguably the most exciting elite-level fighter in the sport today. The 27-year-old from Baltimore has captured an assortment of title belts at 130, 135 and 140 pounds, although the straps won above 130 fall into the WBA regular category, which The Ring does not recognize.

However, regardless of belt legitimacy, Davis is an authentic knockout artist with an excellent skillset. His explosive sixth-round blitzing of Leo Santa Cruz won Knockout of the Year for 2020, and his surprising jump to 140 pounds led to an 11th-round stoppage of the Ring-rated Mario Barrios last June.

"I heard that when Tank was getting ready for [Jose] Pedraza, he sparred Shakur, and I heard it was great work," said Edwards. "Those guys match up well. I think Tank is an elite boxer and an elite puncher, so we'd see what Shakur can do against a guy who could potentially knock him out. I think it's a dangerous fight for Shakur.

"I don't know who wins. Tank is a tremendous fighter and a lot better than some people think. For me, they're both top-10 pound-for-pound fighters. I don't have a winner in the fight, but Tank matches up better against him than any of the other 135-pounders out there. He has the speed to close the distance, he's sparred him before, and he has the power to maybe make Shakur move a bit more than he wants to move. Shakur doesn't run from you; he kind of just teases you, and when you come at him, he takes a step back. After you stop coming at him, he just goes back to his jab and straight left hand. Against Tank, he'd have to be very cautious."

Despite the fact that Edwards would rather see Stevenson fulfill his full potential at 130 pounds before moving north, he's still excited about the possibilities that await him in the lightweight division.

"Look, I think he'll be a great addition to the division," acknowledged Edwards. "I never agreed with people calling those other guys 'The Four Kings' when [Stevenson] was only a division below them. He has the chance to be the best one out of all of them. I think he'll do excellent in the lightweight division, and there's not one of those guys that I'd favor to beat him."

A GUIDING LIGHTWEIGHT

RYAN GARCIA

RECORD: 22-0 (18 KOS)
TITLES: RATED NO. 5 BY THE RING

Garcia is the only fighter on the list who has yet to win a world title, but he's no less dangerous as an opponent. The 23-year-old may be blessed with the looks of a movie star and a colossal social media following, but Garcia is far from being a product of 21st century hype.

His hand speed is incredible, his timing exemplary, and if Davis hits harder, it's not by much. However, we've also seen moments of vulnerability from Garcia, who was floored heavily by a left hand from Luke Campbell in the second round of their January 2021 bout.

"I put him to sleep," said Campbell, who was stopped in the seventh. "I've never seen anyone recover from a shot as quick as that. I was certainly impressed, because I've never seen anybody get put to sleep, get up at the count of four and their legs are fine.

"Garcia's got punch power in both hands. He throws loose and fast, but it's the timing that comes with it. He surprised me in that I caught him with some really good shots and he got stuck in. I didn't expect that, although I still think I was winning the rounds. Of the seven rounds we fought, I thought I was five rounds up. He landed on my arms and stuff, but I was knocking his head back with the jab. Unfortunately for me, I had 16 months out of the ring, I killed myself to make the weight and he got me with a great body shot."

A Garcia-Stevenson showdown would be huge. Like other potential matchups on the list, it might be difficult to make, but hopefully the boxing gods can work some magic. And despite the fact that Garcia still lacks the prerequisite world championship experience, Campbell is convinced it would be a very competitive fight.

"Stevenson could definitely outbox him, but he hasn't been in with someone like Garcia who's got that dominance," said the Englishman. "Garcia's big, he can match Stevenson for speed, and he's got great timing and power. I definitely believe that Lomachenko and Garcia are his biggest tests, so if I was Stevenson, I'd probably go the Kambosos-Haney route.

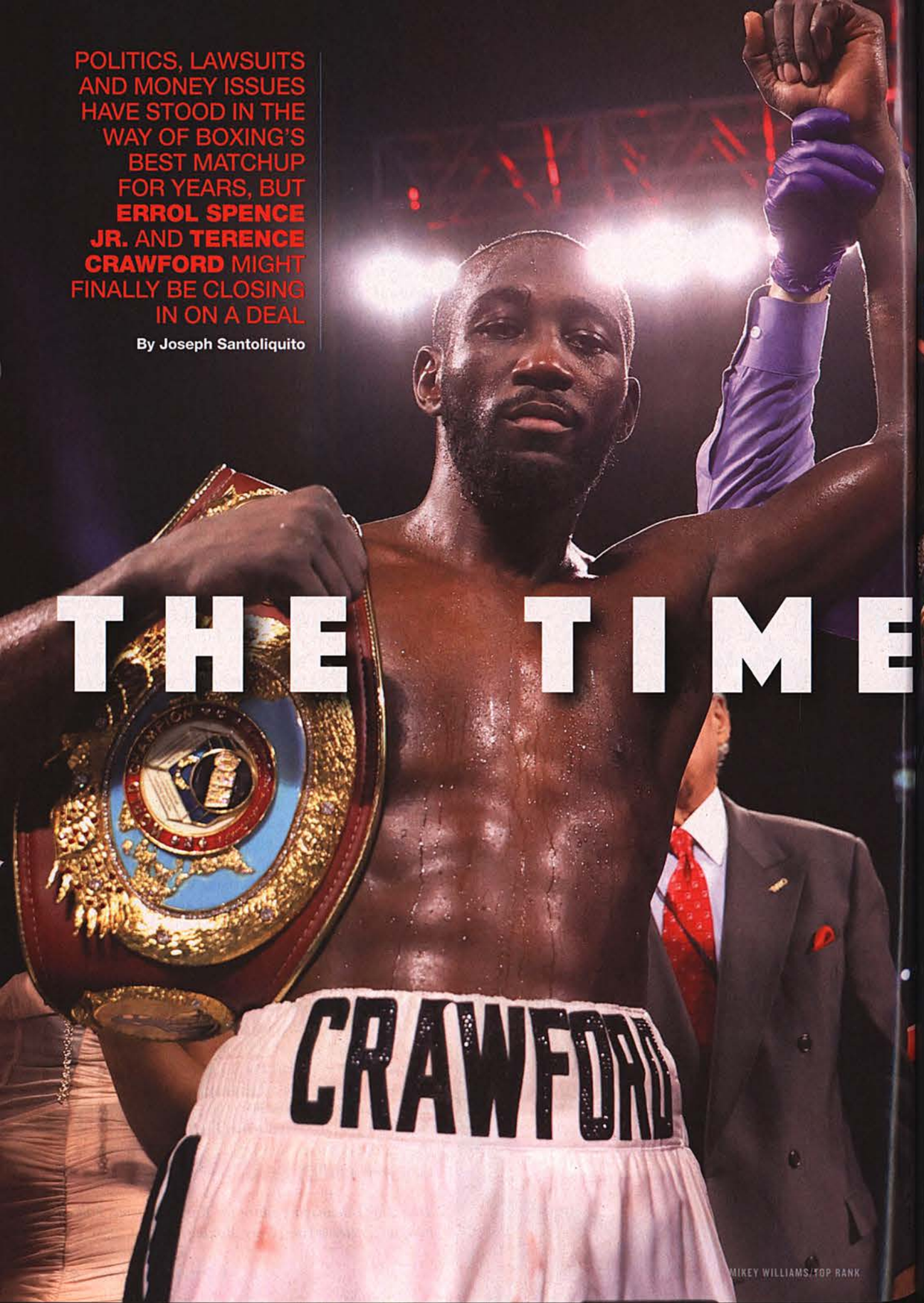
"I do rate Garcia, and I believe that if he lives up to his potential and he's dedicated, he'll also be on the pound-for-pound list and go through the weight categories. He's got good boxing ability and the speed, timing and power that comes with it is a dangerous formula. I'm not sure who wins that fight. Stevenson is good at making people miss, and if Garcia isn't landing, then Stevenson wins. But if Garcia is landing shots and getting to him little by little, then Garcia is right in that fight."

Tom Gray is managing editor for Ring Magazine. Follow him on Twitter @Tom_Gray_Boxing.

POLITICS, LAWSUITS AND MONEY ISSUES HAVE STOOD IN THE WAY OF BOXING'S BEST MATCHUP FOR YEARS, BUT **ERROL SPENCE JR.** AND **TERENCE CRAWFORD** MIGHT FINALLY BE CLOSING IN ON A DEAL

By Joseph Santoliquito

THE TIME IS NOW



MIKEY WILLIAMS/TOP RANK

COOPER NEIL

Just when fans were about to give up on one day seeing an Errol Spence Jr.-Terence Crawford showdown, Spence called out his welterweight rival after stopping Yordenis Ugas on April 16.

Errol Spence Jr. thought he was through. The crowd surrounding the welterweight titleholder on the raised interview platform in the bowels of AT&T Stadium in Arlington, Texas, had thinned some. Spence had just vanquished Yordenis Ugas in 10 rounds to unify his IBF and WBC belts with the WBA title he claimed from the Cuban expatriate.

The event had spilled into an early Sunday morning. Spence was growing agitated over the countless questions about someone everyone in boxing has wanted to see him fight for the last five years: WBO welterweight beltholder Terence "Bud" Crawford.

When someone holding an extended

microphone asked Spence for what seemed to be the eight billionth time why he thinks he can beat Crawford, Spence had finally had it. In a brief burst, he belted out to his inquisitor in his slow Southern drawl, "I don't think I can beat him. I *know* I can beat him! What do you think I'm supposed to say? I'm sure he feels the same. It's a fight that has to be made and a fight that's going to get made!

"Hey, as I said earlier if you weren't listening: Everybody knows who I want next. I want Terence Crawford. That's the fight that I want. That's the fight everybody else wants. Like I said, I'm going to get these straps then go over there and take his shit, too. Terence, I'm coming for that belt!"

So much "wanting" hasn't meant much yet.

Will the boxing world – and more importantly the sports world, since this fight certainly carries over into mainstream appeal – see Spence-Crawford this year?

Can boxing fans finally get what *they* want before the sell-by date passes?

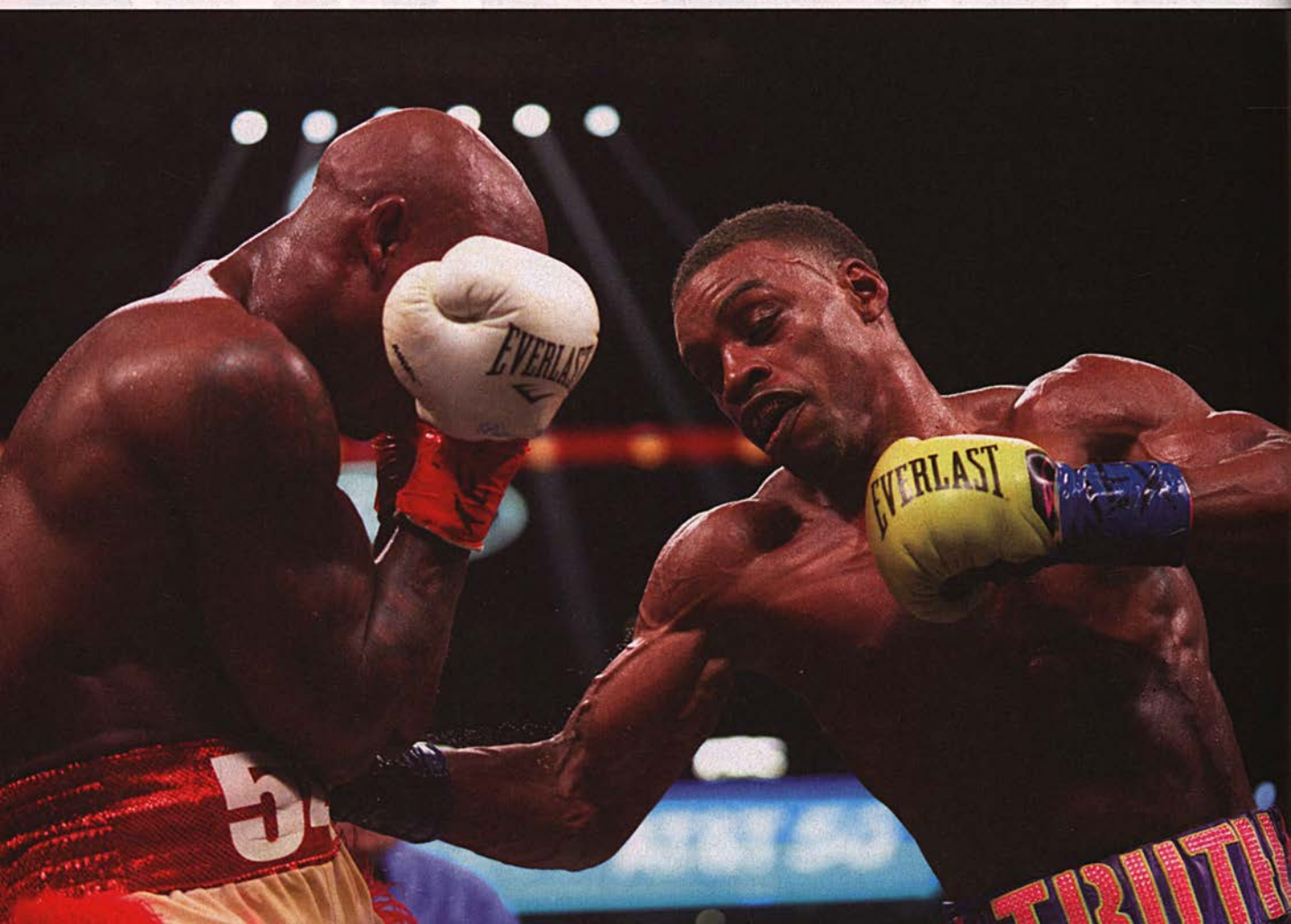
Spence, 32, just came off a 17-month layoff in which there was some question about whether the car crash he survived in October 2019 would affect the southpaw Texan's pristine boxing skills. But against Ugas, Spence (28-0, 22 knockouts) was as brilliant as ever.

The 34-year-old Crawford, defined as a southpaw but able to box on the elite level from either stance, anxiously waits for any news. Languishing in promotional limbo, Bud has fought two times in the last two years against two fighters who have since retired, Kell Brook and Shawn Porter.

"When I'm not watching my daughter run out of her track shoes, I'm working out, staying ready," said Crawford, laughing, when The Ring reached him in mid-May and asked what he's been doing lately. "I know the world wants to see me fight Spence and I want to fight Spence. I know he wants to fight me. I've been in contact with him over the last five months. I have a lot of motivation to make this fight. He has a lot of motivation to make this fight."

Indeed, perhaps the best bet for Crawford (38-0, 29 KOs) is to rip a page out of Floyd Mayweather Jr.'s book. If you'll recall, Mayweather went directly to Manny Pacquiao at a Miami Heat game and the two legends talked it out and – with a considerable push from then-CBS CEO Les Moonves – eventually came to an agreement for their 2015 fight.

"I respect Spence," said Crawford. "I respect every fighter. There are a lot of politics that are factoring into this fight being made. I'm hoping it can be made. I can't see why it can't



Spence unified three titles with his superb performance against Ugas.

Crawford stopped Shawn Porter in his most recent fight.

be made unless I get low-balled. I've called Spence on numerous occasions. I've played my part in getting the fight made and what not. You can't get away from the politics of it, though. There really is nothing dramatically in the way of the fight being made. Me and Spence haven't spoken lately about the fight, but he knows how to reach me. I don't see the problem.

"He wants the fight. I want the fight. Let's make it happen."

Derrick James, Spence's trainer, said the biggest issue lies with money. The timing couldn't be any better. Spence has the IBF, WBA and WBC belts. Crawford holds the WBO title. Before, James pointed out, neither Spence nor Crawford had cleaned out "their side of the street." They since have.

"But this fight has to carry beyond just boxing fans. It is a mainstream fight that sports fans, not just boxing fans, are going to want to see," James said. "I think the problem is some boxing people may see it as a 'boxing fight,' something that doesn't carry the weight Mayweather-Pacquiao did. These guys are stars in their prime right now. This is a fight that needs to be treated along those lines, where serious business people need to get involved.

"If it were up to Errol and Crawford, yes, the two of them sitting down would make this fight happen. I believe that. I really believe that. But it is the number one fight in boxing people want to see. Though it's kind of a sad statement to make, boxers need businessmen to deal with this. This is a fight with world appeal and has to be sold to the people as a fight that the world is intrigued about. And it's true; the world does want to see it. The problem lies with the purses that Errol and Crawford may be asking for – boxing fans may not be able to facilitate that."

It's an interesting point.

Spence could be the A-side, since he has three welterweight titles and Crawford has one. Supporting Spence is the Ring's No. 1 rating at welterweight. Spence has done more financially successful pay-per-view shows and he's done the heavy lifting at 147 pounds, clearing out the division for Crawford (beating Danny Garcia, Ugas, Shawn Porter and Kell Brook in their prime). Porter, Garcia and Ugas are Spence's last three fights, so "The Truth" has not gotten any breaks over the last three years.

Crawford could counter that he's accomplished more at various weight classes. The twist is here is that although Spence holds The Ring's No. 1 rating at welterweight, Crawford is now The Ring's No. 2 pound-for-pound fighter, behind IBF/WBA/WBO heavyweight titlist Oleksandr Usyk, after Canelo Alvarez tumbled down the list due to his upset loss to Dmitry Bivol in May.

The one huge hammer Spence has in his hands – well, actually two – is the support of Premier Boxing Champions and Showtime. If Spence wants the

THE TIME IS NOW

Crawford fight – and he does – PBC owner Al Haymon will do everything in his power to accommodate his fighter. Showtime will come along. After the Spence-Ugas fight, Stephen Espinoza, president of sports and event programming for Showtime, said a Spence-Crawford fight would be the "natural next course Spence takes, as long as it's a fair business deal." Espinoza also stressed, and Showtime maintained, nothing would be negotiated publicly through the media.

"Spence and Crawford both have been very clear this is the fight they want next, and that makes perfect sense," Espinoza said. "The winner will be inarguably the No. 1 boxer in the welterweight division in the wake of the Floyd Mayweather era. We have a better chance to make this fight today than we've had at any point in the past few years, so I am optimistic that it will get done."

Both Spence and Crawford recognize this as their "legacy fight."

They both could use it.

Crawford, though a superstar in the sport, is still highly underrated, if that's possible. Crossover fans should be aware of Crawford's brilliance – but they are not. Many sources around Crawford say he felt that he was woefully underpromoted in his time with Top Rank, which ended in late 2021. On January 11, Crawford threw more angst on an already contentious relationship when he filed a lawsuit against Top Rank seeking nearly $10 million for a breach of contract and alleging "revolting racial bias." Top Rank CEO Bob Arum didn't help matters when he said "I could build a house in Beverly Hills on the money I've lost on him in the last three fights" about Crawford.

So, who do Spence and PBC negotiate with?

It looks like Crawford himself.

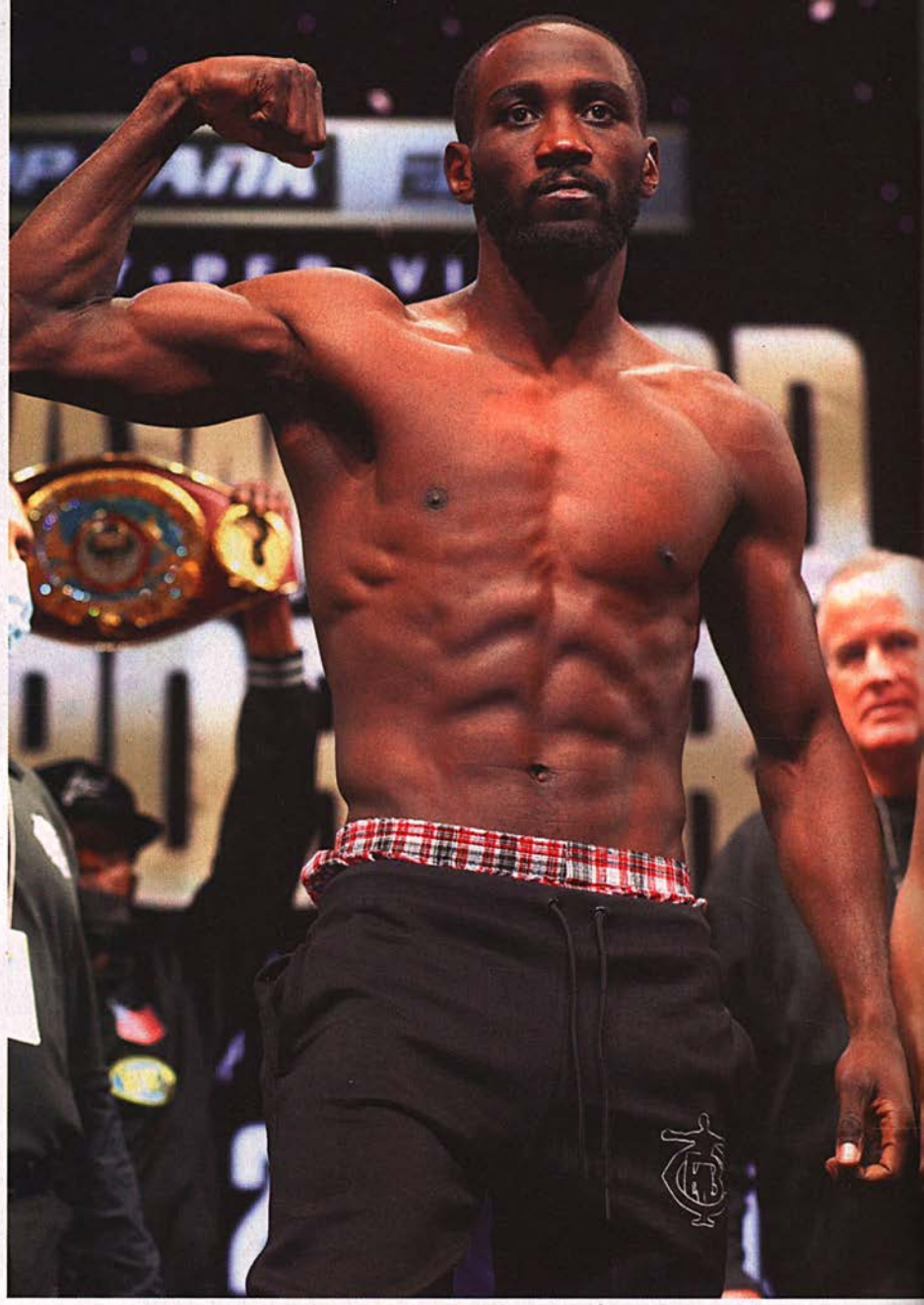
There is dialogue. And without dialogue, there is no fight.

"I know there are a lot of people out there downplaying my accomplishments, saying I haven't fought anyone, saying I'm this and I'm that," Crawford said. "But [when] I fight and I win, there are a lot of people in boxing that don't know too much about boxing, and that's the narrative that they have. I saw Spence's fight against Ugas. I actually thought Errol did well. He did everything he had to do to win. But there are some fighters out there who pose certain threats, and I'm a fighter who poses more threats than an opponent can handle.

"My arsenal allows me to capitalize on the mistakes Errol will make. He does great things that I'm sure will make this a great fight. Again, like I said, if it were up to the two of us, this fight would be made. I don't think I get the respect that I deserve. I think that I am underrated. I can come at an opponent a million different ways. I can change hands in the middle of a round, and I have power with both hands. If I switched from orthodox to southpaw, or southpaw to orthodox, some may think I'm giving up power in my right hand, or power in my left. I'm not. That would be a mistake.

"I hit hard with both hands equally. Errol and I are both in our primes. He has three belts, I have one. There is no better time for this fight to happen but right now."

Who would win if Crawford and



Crawford is rated ahead of Spence in the pound-for-pound rankings ...

Spence were to fight?

"One of Crawford's strongest skills is his ability to fight equally well right-handed and southpaw," said Hall of Famer and Showtime boxing analyst Steve Farhood. "When he switches, he switches for a purpose. He's also great at making adjustments in fights, which allows him to often dominate in the second half of fights. Crawford has decent power, but when he's cooking, he has great accuracy. He's a very smart fighter.

... but Spence is The Ring's No. 1-rated welterweight.

"Crawford is a dominant fighter who's been dominant at more than one weight. He'll need to establish distance against Spence and decide and adjust during the fight whether he wants to fight right-handed or southpaw. Keeping distance will be important because it would limit Spence's body attack. He needs to box and make it a long fight, a distance fight, where he can come on in the second half of the fight."

Spence, Farhood stressed, picks his punches beautifully, and his solid jab and body attack would give Crawford problems.

"Spence also takes a very good shot and he's never been down, I don't think," Farhood said. "The key for Spence to beat Crawford is to stockpile rounds early in the fight, because Crawford tends to be a slow starter. If Spence could come out fast, put on effective pressure right away, he could win those early rounds and that could be the difference, should the fight go the distance.

"Spence's body attack could drain Crawford. He's also the more natural welterweight, and he's a big welterweight. Crawford started as a lightweight."

Al Bernstein, also an acclaimed Showtime analyst and Hall of Famer, likes Crawford's boxing ability to frustrate Spence – maybe take a page out of Porter's approach and box Spence.

"I think Crawford will spend a lot of the fight as a lefty and, with his boxer-puncher skills, depending how things go, may be willing to engage more and sit down a little more on his power punches," Bernstein said. "I think we saw in the Ugas fight that Spence is very good when he jabs his way in, which he would try and do against Crawford. Get on the inside and throw a lot of combinations, the body shots, the uppercuts. He needs to make Crawford uncomfortable the way he did for Ugas. That's where Spence wants this fight to be. He doesn't want to fight from range.

"It's a really good style matchup, because both men are skillful with slightly different approaches. They're made for each other, because they're both boxer-punchers who will engage. Spence is more willing to attack on the inside. Stylistically it lends itself to a really good fight. The general sports media knows this is a fight that has to be and needs to be made. As for its significance, it is *the* fight in boxing. Both Spence and Crawford know it's the time to make this fight."

Joseph Santoliquito is an award-winning sportswriter who has been working for Ring Magazine/RingTV.com since October 1997 and is the president of the Boxing Writers Association of America. He can be followed on Twitter @JSantoliquito.

WORLD CHAMPION
WBC
SUGA
WORLD CHAMPION
WBC

AN ENGLISHMAN IN DETROIT

TYSON FURY'S KNOCKOUT VICTORY OVER DILLIAN WHYTE PAID TRIBUTE TO HIS KRONK CONNECTION AND THE EVERLASTING INFLUENCE OF EMANUEL STEWARD

by Tris Dixon

Fury defended his championship the Kronk way: emphatically.

It was the Kronk way. When Tyson Fury lined Dillian Whyte up for the right uppercut that sent the Brixton man's dreams into orbit over North London, Fury used the type of strategic aggression that Kronk founder Emanuel Steward would have treasured.

Fury distracted Whyte with a couple of jabs and then fired in an uppercut, cracked like a whip, that brought 94,000 screaming fans to one of the great crescendos in a British boxing ring.

"He was always looking for the right hand," confirmed Andy Lee, former world champion, Kronk fighter and now Fury team member. "Not necessarily the uppercut, but while his jab and hook were working, it was occupying Dillian Whyte, keeping him busy and winning Tyson the rounds. It was only a matter of time before he walked him onto something."

The climactic blow was fired with brutal perfection; scientific, thoughtful, high-end chess. Fury had been thinking several moves ahead already, throwing just right hooks to get Whyte used to defending that shot. Then, in the final second of the sixth round, came the sweeping uppercut followed by a shove that the challenger for Fury's Ring and WBC titles later contended caused him to bang his head on the canvas, doing the majority of the damage.

Fury, of course, spent time training at the Kronk – and with Steward – before

Wladimir Klitschko iced Eddie Chambers in the final seconds of their title bout in 2010.

the legendary Detroit fight guru passed away in 2012.

Steward was impressed with the Morecambe contender and on a clip that has since gone viral predicted the three top heavyweights in the world at one time or another would be Fury, Deontay Wilder and Anthony Joshua.

Steward is gone, but his reputation and legacy lives on. Fury's worldwide fame ensures that the Kronk brand is linked to the heavyweight championship, but what Steward left behind goes beyond one man and one fighter.

In Fury's corner on fight night were Lee and SugarHill Steward, who is Fury's head trainer and Emanuel's nephew. In Whyte's corner was another key Steward man, Harold "Shadow" Knight, and in the BT Sport Box Office broadcast booth was one of Steward's many kings, Lennox Lewis.

You didn't have to look too hard to be reminded of the famous red and gold.

SugarHill became Fury's lead trainer on Lee's recommendation. He swiftly transformed Fury from a back-foot jabber and feinter who didn't allow opponents to get set to an aggressive giant, someone who is equally happy to go in and lead rather than respond.

"I knew when Tyson rang me looking for a trainer what Sugar would do with him," said Lee. "I know Sugar. I know how he trains. I know the style he teaches, and Tyson's kind of perfected that style – being dominant, being aggressive, a lot of jabbing, controlling your man with your feet, then a lot of strong right hands and being physical on the inside, too."

Joey Gamache is a former lightweight titleholder, and not only is he a Steward protégé, but he coached Swedish heavyweight Otto Wallin to face Fury in the Englishman's last fight before Fury left Ben Davison for Hill.

He's seen Fury become more aggressive.

"That's an emphasis the Kronk pushed, that they can see punchers and work with them. Guys who could punch well and big guys, especially on their front foot; they don't just get on that back foot and make that size work for them," Gamache said of Fury's newfound spite and hostility. "Knockouts sell, and why let someone stay in and survive if you can get them out of there? That's part of what goes with the Kronk way."

Fury has also adopted the Kronk mindset, where the mission is not just to win but to be victorious emphatically and inside the distance.

Two of Steward's heavyweights, Lewis and Wladimir Klitschko, were lambasted by Steward in contests for adopting approaches that the coach found too cautious.

"You know he's going to run to survive, so we need to get him out of there," Steward abruptly told Klitschko before the last round against Eddie Chambers in 2010. "There's no way he should be going 12 rounds with you. No way. But you stop, you won't let the punches go and then you wait. You wait. You wait ... Your volume of punches is too low. You're not punching. You've got to let your punches go, Wladimir."

Wladimir, unusually rattled, meekly replied, "I will try, Emanuel. Relax."

Not relaxing, Steward snapped: "You do not need to have another bullshit decision. I'm telling you."

Klitschko knocked Chambers out cold and through the ropes in the next round.

But Lennox got a more severe riot act read to him as he outboxed Mike Tyson through the middle rounds of their 2002 megafight. After Round 4, and with Lewis in a clear ascendancy, an irate Steward fired: "Get this motherfucker outta here, man. You fuck around, you're going to get caught with some crazy shit. Step it up. The man is finished."

Tyson lasted until the eighth, but Lewis took a battering in the corner between rounds while Tyson took his licks inside the ropes.

SugarHill recalls that night well because he was there in Memphis.

"I remember it because [Tyson] was a dead man walking," he explained. "That's what Emanuel said: 'You've got to get him out of there or you'll get caught with something stupid.' That's the intensity of the heavyweight division with all of these experienced punchers. Some might not understand how to punch properly at that weight, but a lot of them do. We (Hill and Fury) both want the knockout. We want to get it over with. We don't want the judges or it going to the scorecards at all."

Against Whyte, Fury didn't coast to the finish line. He took control and closed the show.

"He didn't have to," said Lewis when asked why Fury didn't settle for outboxing Whyte. "His boxing IQ was way more advanced than Dillian's and it really showed when Dillian was following him around. You don't follow a guy around. He followed him and got caught coming in."

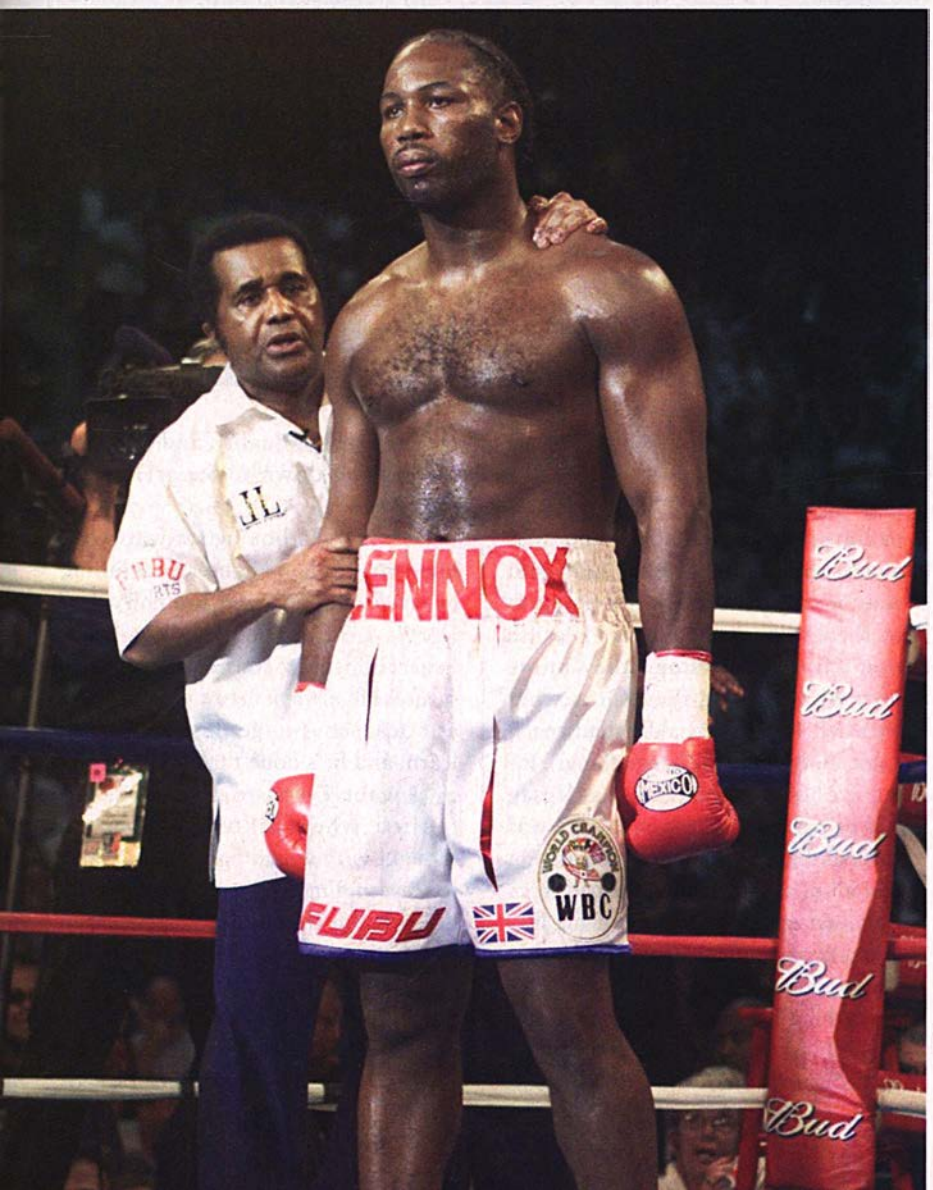
Fury sent 94,000 fans home in a jubilant euphoria. Irishman Lee had his share of spectacular wins and knew what his chilling knockouts would mean each time he returned to the rec center in Motown.

"I think he's got the Kronk attitude," Lee said of Fury. "That's what Kronk is to me. There was every type of [fighting] style in the Kronk, but it's the attitude to go in and get your man out of there. It's just that mentality. Because in the Kronk, if you win, it's 'Well done, fair play, but you didn't get a knockout.' You come into the gym after a knockout, you're running down the stairs and everyone's cheering you for getting a knockout and patting you on the back."

Fury received plenty of pats on the back after disassembling Whyte.

Discussions began about where he would figure among the all-time greats, not strictly on his 32-0-1 resume but because he looks so hard to fight against. Who would have the tools to take on an aggressive 6-foot-9 giant who can do just

Emanuel Steward demanded aggression from his heavyweights, including Lennox Lewis.



AN ENGLISHMAN IN DETROIT

about everything?

SugarHill has plenty of faith in his charge, who said he had retired after the Whyte fight, and puts Tyson alongside Steward's other two big men, Lewis and Klitschko, as an all-time great ... At the very least alongside them.

"Listen, Tyson is right up there with the both of them," SugarHill explained. "For me, Tyson has everything each of those fighters had and more; that's just the truth. Wladimir was a good boxer. Lennox had more of an aggressive 'I'll get you out of there' attitude. Tyson has both of those components – good jab, good right hand, good left hook, good to the body ... Those two didn't even go to the body that much, [but] Tyson goes to the body as much as anybody else. Tyson has charisma, character and charm – all of that."

"He's becoming more of a complete fighter," admitted Lewis of Fury.

"Sugar knows that Tyson is a great puncher, and that size and his punching ability works well together. And you've got to give credit to Tyson Fury; he's able to put all that together and use the combinations to take out people, and now he's showing not only that he has a right hand but he has a right uppercut and other techniques in his arsenal. Tyson Fury has a lot more than he's shown."

Fury also has that desire to finish his opponents that harkens back to the days of Kronk destroyers, gym wars and devastating finishers, and it is exactly what SugarHill wanted to see.

"I'm a different breed. I'm old school," the trainer asserted. "I want my fighter to take less punishment and give out the punishment. Fans want to see somebody get hit; they want to see the knockout. I'm only training fighters to get knockouts. I'm not [bothering with] the decision."

Lee is happy to be part of it and thrilled that the retro red and gold lives on in 2022. He's proud of his own Detroit heritage, too, and knows Emanuel would have been happy to have seen what unfolded in Wembley on April 23 and with so many of his team present.

As Lee explained: "Emanuel used to have assistant coaches and he'd always say, 'I'd just like my fighters to train my fighters. If I'm not going to be there, I'll ask the fighters because they know the system, they know how we work and they know what we teach. If you have a different coach come in, they try to change things.' It's a great honor to carry on that legacy and be part of that legacy, to say I was a Kronk fighter and a world champion and all of those things I learned from Emanuel in the last years of his life. Outside of my parents, he's probably the biggest influence in my life. Everything I do is influenced by him."

Lennox thinks Emanuel's communication with his fighters was a standout quality, and he's seen that passed down to SugarHill and the others.

Lee is now a boxing stalwart with his own stable of fighters, including heavyweight contender Joseph Parker, Fury's campmate. But like Fury, SugarHill is now considering his own future. He always maintained his job as a teacher is to get his students to learn, and he's done that with Fury.

"I want Tyson to be happy," he replied when asked whether he thought Fury would fight again. "Even for myself, I'm OK to walk away from boxing. I'm thinking about taking a hiatus, just to reflect on things. I've done everything. I've had lighter-weight division champions. I've had a devastating amateur team – No. 1 in the U.S. – that produced a lot of champions ... Coming up from just having a couple of kids, picking them up in my truck, getting off work, I've done all that stuff ... Raised and watched those kids turn into men. And then the pinnacle of it is with this heavyweight division and getting knockouts. Ever since me and Tyson hooked up, he's been a dominant heavyweight and he's been knocking everybody out."

TIMOTHY A. CLARY/AFP

Andy Lee moved to Detroit from Ireland to be trained by Steward at Kronk.

And while SugarHill contemplates his next move, he too is proud that the imagery of the old Detroit sweatshop lives on through today's coaches and fighters.

He sees Fury as a Kronk legend, and it's not just the boxers the iconic brand has created, it is trainers and supporters.

The red and gold means a lot to an awful lot of people within the sport.

"They're Kronk, too; it's in their blood," SugarHill said of the fans who still recognize the famous emblem. "It's what they grew up with. They saw it. It gives them goosebumps like that Tyson Fury ringwalk gave everybody goosebumps. I'm a product of Kronk. Emanuel Steward was a part of that Kronk, too. It was a recreational center in Detroit that Emanuel made famous, and I've kept that name going with exciting championship wins, producing knockouts and doing just what Emanuel would have been doing."

He is not the only one, either, and he acknowledges that.

"There's Andy Lee; there's Johnathon Banks, too; Harold Knight; Mark Breland came through," SugarHill added. "You got a lot of people [who came] through that program. If you're involved with a dominating program like that, you've got a better chance – that's like someone wanting to go and play on the best teams – and you've got a lot of experience coming out of that gym. And I'm just happy to be out here leading the way, making sure things are done right."

Lennox was delighted that Emanuel's footprint was so visible on one of the sport's gala nights a decade after his passing.

"It makes me feel good," said the heavyweight great. "It highlights his legacy and what he's done for the sport and what he's done for his fighters. He's done so much for his champions."

Fury and SugarHill are 3-0 with three knockouts together. Their time as a team has been comparatively short, but they've made an impact, and Gamache sees Fury as a Kronk fighter now.

"I see it," Joey said. "He's got different looks to him. They've done a great job with him, working off the jab more, which is something the Kronk emphasizes – good fundamentals – and that's part of what SugarHill does."

"Oh, absolutely," Lennox agreed. "Everybody that is connected to the Kronk and has ties with Kronk or is with Emanuel or Sugar, that's Kronk right there."

"Come on, man," SugarHill said when asked whether Fury could be deemed a Kronk fighter. "Always. He is a Kronk fighter just like I'm a Kronk guy. We're all Kronk until we die. That's it. You can't take that from us. It means a lot when you come into the Kronk gym. All those fighters that boxed at the Kronk, whether they made it or not, they're still Kronk family, still Kronk blood, and it's always going to be that way."

GREATEST HITS: MARCO ANTONIO BARRERA

AS ONE OF THE FOUR KINGS OF THE 21ST CENTURY AND ONE OF MEXICO'S BEST EVER, "THE BABY-FACED ASSASSIN" PRODUCED ONE CLASSIC AFTER ANOTHER

By Anson Wainwright

Barrera gained notice as a 115-pound prospect in the early 1990s, but he made his name at junior featherweight.

Marco Antonio Barrera is a versatile man. As a young university student, he studied law. Simultaneously, as a budding professional boxer, he blasted his way to 43 consecutive wins. And eventually he turned his analytic eye toward himself, morphing from a seek-and-destroy puncher to a skilled technician in a career that would see world titles in three divisions and gain him a place in the pantheon of Mexico's all-time greats.

Barrera was born in Mexico City on January 17, 1974, one of four children. His father worked as a set designer and his mother was a housewife. Unlike many of his countrymen who used boxing as a means to escape poverty, Barrera grew up in a financially stable family. Nevertheless, his childhood was not without challenges.

"Iztacalco was a dangerous neighborhood," Barrera told The Ring through his son Marco. "I was fighting day by day. You had to always be aware of your surroundings. That's where you learn how to fight and defend yourself."

Barrera's older brother, Jorge, boxed and received more attention since his coach, Rudy Perez, believed Jorge had more potential than his younger sibling. Nevertheless, Barrera won a national title and compiled a 65-5 amateur record before turning pro at the age of 15.

"I was fighting in high school," he said. "My day started at 3 a.m. I went out running, then breakfast, and then went to school."

Barrera won the national title at junior bantamweight in his 17th pro bout and made five defenses before claiming the NABF 115-pound title in his 27th fight.

The 20-year-old then traveled to Argentina to face future two-weight titleholder Carlos Salazar in a WBC 115-pound title eliminator. Unfortunately, Barrera officially missed weight, but he disputes that.

"I always carry my own scale," he said. "However, the promoter had a different scale that put me two pounds heavier than I had to be."

Although Barrera won a hard-fought 10-round majority decision, it was Salazar who was given the world title shot.

"The thing is, nobody really gave me a world title shot in the lower weight classes. That's why I had to move up in weight," he explained. "If they gave me the opportunity to fight for a world title at 115 or 118, I would have been a world champion even earlier."

Less than a year later, Barrera received his long overdue world title shot up at 122 pounds against WBO titlist Daniel Jimenez.

"I didn't finish law school; I was in the second year when the world title fight came," said Barrera. "My parents were like, 'If you lose the world title, then you've got to [go to] law school.' So, when I won the world title, I dropped out of college and 100 percent focused on boxing."

The new champion's star quickly ascended and his reputation marked him as one of the best young fighters in the sport – and perhaps the next big-name Mexican. Perhaps even someone who could help fill the void as Julio Cesar Chavez entered the final stretch of his legendary career.

Barrera made eight defenses before he stunningly came up against his "Poison" in the form of respected former bantamweight titleholder Junior Jones.

"I had a mild malformation in my head that was leaking blood to my brain, and every time it would do that, I had small seizures. But I did not give importance to that," said Barrera, who was twice on the canvas in Round 5 and lost via disqualification when one of his cornermen entered the ring to save him from further punishment. "So I went into the ring and lost the fight. After the fight, I was examined by the doctor. He said I was alive by a miracle, because someone else with that type of mild malformation would have died by impact right away."

Incredibly, Barrera faced Jones in a direct rematch five months later.

"I wanted to go back and fight," said Barrera, who lost a competitive 12-round unanimous decision. "Even in my preparation, I was running and felt the shocks going all through my body. I went and fought.

"After the fight, I went to my parents' house and started having seizures, and my mom instantly took me to the doctors."

It appeared as though his once-promising career had come to an abrupt end.

"I thought my boxing career was completely over," he admitted. "It was either [have surgery] or be on pills the rest of my life.

"My sister said, 'If you want to go back in the ring, you've got to have the surgery, because you can't just live on pills.' Dr. Ignacio Madrazo, who was Muhammad Ali's doctor too, he guaranteed I was completely fine and could step back in the ring. The operation took eight hours."

After 10 months spent recovering, Barrera decided to return

to boxing.

"I did eight title defenses, but I was living in the same place. I didn't have a car," he said. "I said, 'I haven't really done anything in boxing.' I thought God gave me a second chance, so I completely took it."

Firstly, "The Baby-Faced Assassin" regained his confidence with a few tune-ups. Then he got his old WBO 122-pound belt back by stopping Richie Wenton after three rounds in 1998.

After two title defenses, he met archrival Erik Morales in an instant classic in early 2000. Despite losing a split decision, the fight was so intense and hotly contested that Barrera's reputation was enhanced.

The next big opportunity was when he met lineal featherweight champion Naseem Hamed in 2001. Barrera, who was a 3-to-1 underdog, shocked the naysayers, boxing a very disciplined fight to take the Brit's unbeaten record.

Barrera officially became a two-weight titleholder when he leveled the score with Morales to claim the Ring and WBC 126-pound belts in 2002. Subsequent wins over Johnny Tapia and Kevin Kelley followed.

But just as stunningly as he had beaten Hamed, Barrera had the carpet yanked from under him by a relatively unknown Manny Pacquiao.

"Leading up to that fight, there were problems," said Barrera. "It was a secret that I'd had brain surgery, but my promoters at the time showed the commission I'd had brain surgery, so the Nevada commission called me and were not letting me fight. The moment they released me, I had 15 days to prepare for that fight. It's not an excuse, because we lost to a really great fighter, but it was a really big thing to deal with at that moment."

It was time again for Barrera to move up in weight. This time he headed up to junior lightweight, where he settled one of boxing's bitterest rivalries with Morales, edging a 12-round majority decision for the WBC title. He made four defenses and also added the IBF belt to his collection.

However, he lost to Juan Manuel Marquez and then the rematch with Pacquiao. Although he fought on, Barrera's appearances became less frequent until he bowed out with a homecoming fight in 2011. He retired with a record of (67-7, 44 KOs).

"I was 37 years old when I retired. I fought whoever I had to fight," said the 2017 International Boxing Hall of Fame inductee. "I didn't leave anything pending. Life since then has been really great. So I think I left boxing at the right time."

Barrera, now 48, is married, has four children and lives in Guadalajara. He worked as a commentator for TV Azteca for over a decade, has a popular podcast with Morales and owns a gym in Mexico City – Gym Barrera.

He enjoyed looking back on his career and reminiscing about seven career-defining performances for readers of The Ring:

DANIEL JIMENEZ

March 31, 1995, Arrowhead Pond, Anaheim, California • Title: WBO junior featherweight

"He was the only champion who was going to give us the opportunity to fight for the world title.

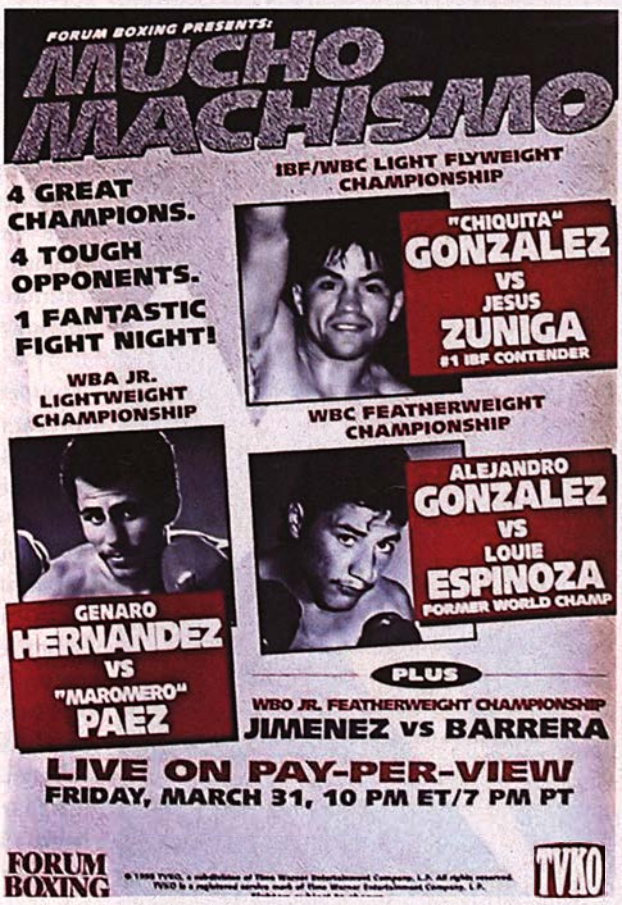
"Having to jump from 115 to 122 was a really difficult thing to do. Camp was completely different from all the other fights. But we didn't care about that. It was a title fight, so we were going all out.

"It was a very special night, because every boxer's dream is being world champion. So, from the first bell, my mindset was going all out to become world champion. My mindset was on fulfillment.

"My dream came true – I was a world champion. I didn't think I was going to do more than that.

"I was a very low-key champion. I just went back to the hotel room and ordered room service for family and friends and we celebrated."

RESULT: BARRERA UD 12



KENNEDY MCKINNEY

February 3, 1996, Great Western Forum, Inglewood, California • Title: WBO junior featherweight

"[Then-HBO Sports executive] Lou DiBella came and said, 'Do you want to come and fight for HBO on the new Boxing After Dark series?' What I was looking for at that moment was more recognition. ... Without thinking twice about it, I said, 'Yes.' I had to fight Kennedy McKinney – a real threat, a real champion.

"It was an all-out war. We knew from the initial bell it was going to be like that – a former world champion, Olympic gold medalist – we knew we had a big challenge coming up. He was the first fighter to send me to the canvas in my career [in Round 11]. We knew we had a real fight going on. He just caught me by surprise; I wasn't expecting that right hand. When I got up, I stuck to the plan, continued what I was doing, didn't really change what I was doing, was just a little more cautious about not getting caught by the same right hand.

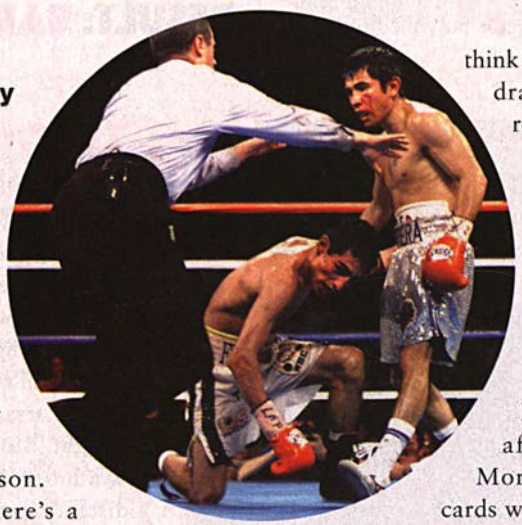
"I felt relief, I felt happiness [at the end of the fight], because I was completely exhausted. I hit him with my best punches and he kept punching me back. When I caught him with the right hand, I thought he was going to get up and the referee counted him out [in Round 12].

"Lou DiBella came up to me and said, 'That's what we were expecting. That's the [kind of fight] we want on HBO.' From that moment, I started fighting for HBO."

RESULT: BARRERA TKO 12

ERIK MORALES

February 19, 2000, Mandalay Bay Event Center, Las Vegas • Titles: WBC/WBO junior featherweight



"Before the fight was signed, there was a lot of trash talk between him and I. There was a lot of hate between us. My camp was in Big Bear [California] and I remember saying to myself, 'Any fighter can beat me but Morales.'

"He was angry for some reason. I was born in Mexico City. There's a common thing between [Mexican] boxers that says boxers from Mexico City are the toughest, the most feared boxers there are. The press asked him about fighting a fighter from Mexico City. [They said Morales] has to be dangerous, him being close to the border. He said, 'I'm the best.' There was back and forth going on just because of the fact that we were from Tijuana and Mexico City.

"I remember he hit me in the fifth round with a right hand in between my neck and my chest. I was going down but, in my mind, I was like, 'Morales can't take me down. Anyone can take me down but Morales.' I hit him back. I think it's remembered as one of the most dramatic rounds; it was considered round of the year.

"Props to Morales. He was a warrior. I punched him, he punched me back. It was back and forth action. To this day, over 20 years later, people still remember that fight. People still consider it the best fight of the trilogy.

"I felt bad. I felt sad [about losing.] I told the commentator after the fight, I told HBO that Morales was no good, knowing the cards weren't on my side. Even though the people say I won, it still felt really bad.

"I took a vacation; I went to Acapulco. I completely stepped away from boxing. I had to take a little bit of time for myself. No noticeable injuries, only the left ear. He hit me a lot on that ear. If I put a lot of pressure on it, it hurts to this day.

"However, the WBO came to Mexico City, to my house, to give me the belt back. In the press conference they told me I was their champion and they reinstated me as champion."

RESULT: MORALES SD 12

NASEEM HAMED

April 7, 2001, MGM Grand Garden Arena, Las Vegas • Title: Lineal championship

"Rian – Hamed's brother – approached me and said, 'To me, you won the Morales fight. So we want a fight with you, because you're the best.' For me it was a great offer because Hamed had come from beating every champion of every organization. It was a good fight. It was the best fighting the best, and that's all I wanted to do. That was the best purse in all my career.

"Something that stands out, because I felt like I was in a movie: When I was training in Big Bear, training for the Hamed fight, the snow was up to our knees, so my team was running in front of me making space so I could run. It felt like a Rocky movie.

"My mindset was completely different. We studied all of his fights. We watched his tactics and what had to be done. Something I really saw was that his opponents let Hamed do anything he wanted. They let him move, dirty tactics. In my mind – I didn't tell my corner this – [I was thinking] if he plays dirty, I'm going to play dirty.

"That was my big task, 100 percent, to get recognition from all the world. Changing my tactics, outboxing Hamed. That was definitely one of my best performances. I completely changed my tactics. There's a saying in boxing: With a right hand, you can beat a southpaw. I wanted to change that and demonstrate with a good jab and left hand you can completely outbox a southpaw. So we completely changed the outcome of the fight.

"The people's reception was insane. After the fight, I was eating in a restaurant in the hotel in Las Vegas and there was a huge line outside just waiting for me. Back in Mexico, my wife already had a party set up. It was the first time I celebrated a big fight."

RESULT: BARRERA UD 12

ERIK MORALES 2

June 22, 2002, MGM Grand Garden Arena, Las Vegas • Titles: WBC and vacant Ring featherweight

"The press was pressuring him, saying he didn't really want to fight. He asked for a second fight, so we gave it to him. The second fight with Morales was a fight that needed to be made. It was necessary for the people to see a second showdown, because in the first one there was still doubt about who really won the fight and the fans were still hungry for more. So it had to be made.

"We didn't change anything in camp. We had the right strategy, the same thing we did in the first fight. Morales changed his fighting style; we saw a lot of movement from him, working from a distance and using his reach to his advantage. I had to slowly work my way in, hitting to the body, trying to slow him down, and it worked. It was a very necessary rematch. A lot of people saw me win. It was just a classical Mexican fight.

"It was very overwhelming, because we knew the Ring Magazine belt was only won by the best fighting the best and beating the best. It was a really overwhelming feeling having that belt. That belt opened so many doors for me. It was really, really big for me."

RESULT: BARRERA UD 12

ERIK MORALES 3

November 27, 2004, MGM Grand Garden Arena, Las Vegas • Title: WBC junior lightweight

"When I won the WBC title at 126, Mauricio Sulaiman didn't give me my belt. When I was in camp for the third Morales fight, Mauricio came to my camp to wish me good luck. I said, 'I don't need your luck. What I need is my two belts: the one you didn't give me last time [at 126] and the one I'm going to win this time.

"Mauricio thought because it was 130 pounds that I wasn't going to beat Morales. He gave me a pat on the back and said, 'Yeah, yeah, I'll do that.'

"Twenty-four hours before the fight, I had a double cheeseburger and fries before the weigh-in. Ever since I was at 122, it was my mentality: before the weigh-in, I had to eat my cheeseburger, eat my fries and drink my soda. Why? I don't know. It always worked. I never had problems with it. Oscar De La Hoya walked into my room and saw me eating the burger and thought I had weight problems to the point that he said, 'Hey, if you want, we can order the plane and get you out of here?'

"It was a great relief, overcoming everything. All the drama behind the scenes, saying the gloves had to be Winning, had to be yellow.

"After the fight, you can see me on video holding two fingers to Mauricio, saying, 'You owe me two belts.' Yes, he gave them to me.

"I think my best performance and the easiest one was the third one. [There were] never any talks of a fourth fight. We still have a couple of issues. It's 20 years and counting."

RESULT: BARRERA MD 12

JUAN MANUEL MARQUEZ

March 17, 2007, Mandalay Bay Event Center, Las Vegas • Title: WBC junior lightweight

"We weren't really a fan of cherry-picking. My mentality was to fight the best, and at that moment the promoter said, 'Marquez is the best right now. You've got to fight him.' I didn't look at it twice and said, 'I'm fighting Marquez.'

"There wasn't really bad blood, there wasn't really friendship. We were just two fighters. We were even from the same neighborhood in Mexico City, just a few houses between. My brother saw him frequently in the ice cream shops, but I didn't see him.

"It was an all-out war, two Mexicans in the ring. What else can you expect? It's going to be trading punches back and forth. It was in the third round that I knocked him down. Unfortunately, I slipped and punched him when he was on the ground. At the end of the day, they lifted his hand up and I have to live with it and accept that loss. I did what was necessary for me to win the fight. Unfortunately, the judges saw it the other way."

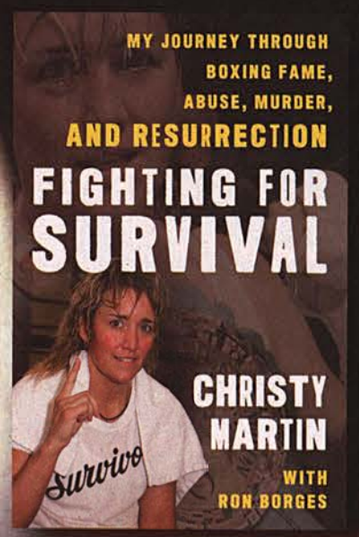
RESULT: MARQUEZ UD 12

Marco Barrera helped coordinate and translate this feature. The Ring appreciates his assistance. Questions and/or comments can be sent to Anson at elraincoat@live.co.uk and you can follow him on Twitter @AnsonWainwright.

LIKE A PHOENIX

CHRISTY MARTIN'S NEAR DEATH AT THE HANDS OF HER ABUSIVE HUSBAND-MANAGER WAS THE STARTING POINT FOR THE PIONEERING FIGHTER'S REBIRTH

By Christy Martin with Ron Borges (introduction by Borges)



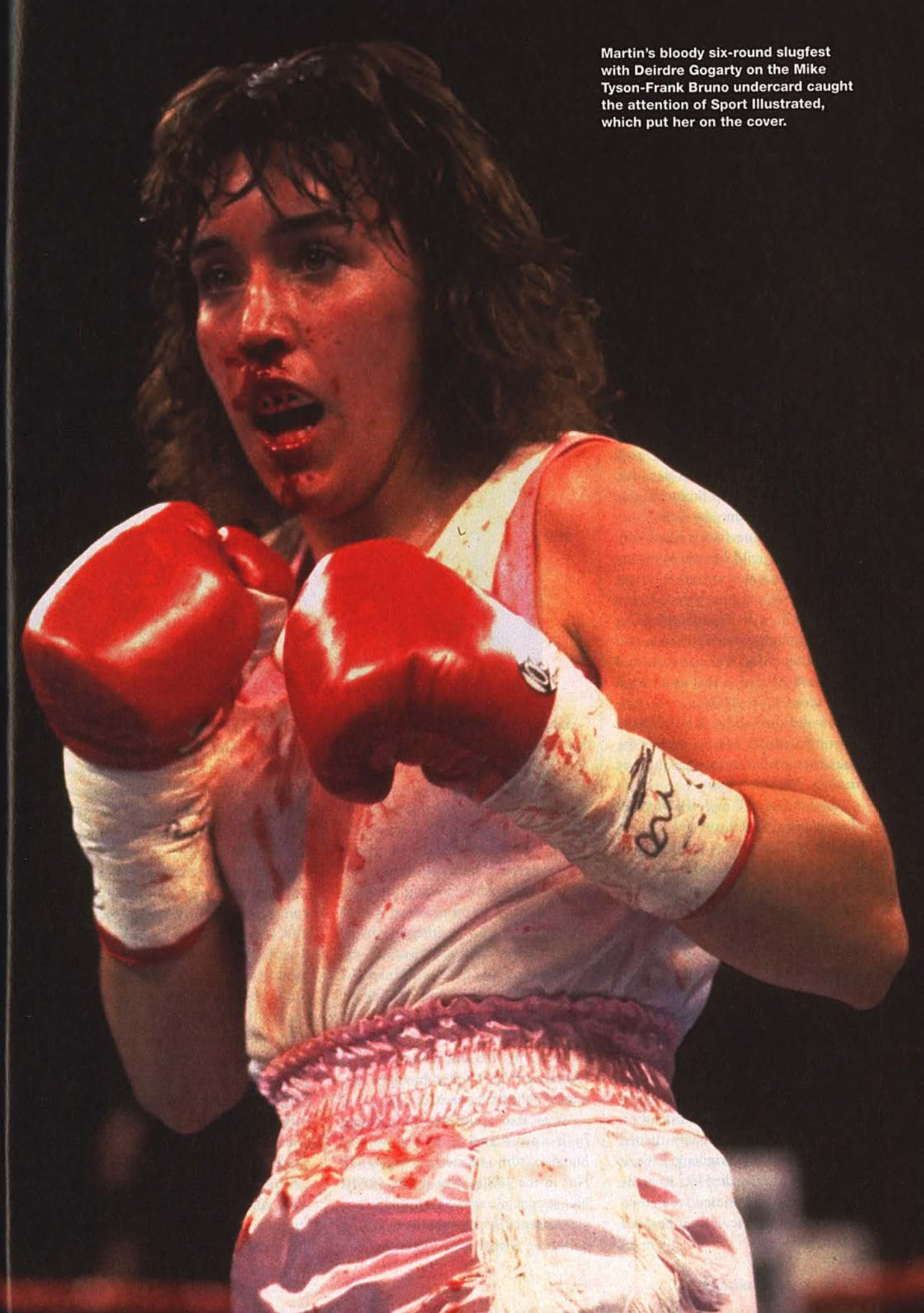
Christy Martin spent most of her life hiding. For someone who for two decades was the most famous female fighter in the world, it wasn't easy. It was almost fatal.

Sexually abused at the age of 6, domestically abused physically and mentally for nearly 20 years in a sham marriage and finally left to die on her bedroom floor from gunshot wounds and multiple stabbings after telling her husband she was leaving him, Christy Martin has lived the life of Job. Like Job, she suffered. But also like Job she never lost faith in herself, even when it was shaken by drug addiction, a stroke, the loss of the $5 million in purses she'd earned and a 40-year fight to live freely as a successful gay woman athlete.

Fighting for Survival is the extraordinary tale of a boxer's rise from a broken West Virginia coal mining town to become the fighter who legitimized women competing in professional combat sports. The trail Martin blazed would later be followed by Laila Ali, two-time Olympic gold medalist Claressa Shields and UFC star Ronda Rousey. None would have existed were it not for her, because until she emerged, every major promoter in boxing and mixed martial arts refused to put a woman on their fight cards and swore they never would.

What changed that was "The Coal Miner's Daughter," who walked into the ring dressed in pink and often left spattered in red with her opponent lying on the floor. Before Martin's rise, female boxing was banned in most states and countries, and in the few where it existed, it was viewed as a freak show. Then Christy Martin punched her way through that roped-off glass ceiling.

She became the first woman to sign with a major promoter when Don King agreed to handle her career. She became the first to win a championship from a recognized world rating organization. She became the first to make a $100,000 payday. The first to make a $500,000 payday. The first to sign for a million-dollar purse. The first to fight on cable television, pay-per-view and at Madison Square Garden. She remains the only female fighter ever to appear on the cover of Sports Illustrated and became the first woman boxer elected to the International Boxing Hall of Fame. But that was just her public life. Behind the curtain was hidden a far darker story.



Martin's bloody six-round slugfest with Deirdre Gogarty on the Mike Tyson-Frank Bruno undercard caught the attention of Sport Illustrated, which put her on the cover.

JOHN IACONO

What drove her to hit so hard and attack opponents so relentlessly? The answer lay in the shadows.

Her tales of fighting for King for eight years are ones of growing popularity, swelling purses and a constant feeling that she wasn't always getting what she was supposed to get after the check cleared. Always lingering in the background was one worry, not of losing but of having her secrets revealed by someone from her past or by one man in her present: her abusive husband.

Martin fought on some of the biggest promotions in boxing history. She was often paired on pay-per-view with Mike Tyson, the most feared heavyweight champion in decades. During those years, she broke barriers for women every time she won.

Fighting for Survival is filled with stories of the wild life surrounding Tyson, about the massive build-up to Martin's match with Ali, the bloody fight with Deirdre Gogarty that legitimized women's boxing and many other tales, some joyous and others not. All are as real as a punch in the face.

How did she survive it all? For the first time, Christy Martin reveals the true story of her suffering and her triumph. The whole story.

"I don't ever call myself a victim," Martin says. "I tell abused women I speak with today as long as they think of themselves as victims, they still are. I'm not a victim of anything. I'm a survivor."

Jim Martin wraps Christy's hands before a bout in 1995.

CHAPTER 1: DEAD ON THE FLOOR

I could hear my husband sharpening a knife in the front room. Because he was also my longtime abuser, I knew he wasn't doing it to carve up a turkey. He was doing it to carve up his wife.

Long after he left me for dead on my bedroom floor, that day turned out to be one of thanksgiving. True, it was the day I nearly died like so many other battered and abused women do each year, but for me, it was the day I came to life.

Like all the battles that would make me among the first women fighters inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame, it would be a bloody victory as much over myself as my opponent. I'm Christy Martin, the fighter who legitimized combat sports for women. I've been called the Jackie Robinson of female boxing because I was the one who transformed it from a circus act into a legitimate athletic contest. For more than 20 years it was a great ride. The only problem was I nearly died in the process, because for all of that time, and for most of my life really, I hid the fact that there was more to my life than championship fights and the biggest paydays any female fighter ever earned.

I was also a closeted gay athlete in a sport and a world where homosexuality was never going to sell. Not in the 1980s. Not in the 1990s. Not so much even today, frankly.

I certainly understand it's a different world now than the one I knew coming up as a woman in a male-dominated sport, but if it's so different, where are all the other gay women boxers? Why are the biggest female stars in sports still sold as much in high heels and short skirts as in sneakers or cleats?

We all know there are plenty of gay men and women in professional sports. There always have been and always will be. A few, like the American soccer star Megan Rapinoe, proudly proclaim it. That's great, but the truth is it's a lot easier to do that with an Olympic gold medal around your neck and a World Cup in your arms. For most of the rest of us, it's a public declaration not so easily made, and that can make for a difficult life.

How would I know? Well, you see, I'm also Christy Salters, a coal miner's daughter from Itmann, West Virginia, long locked in a fight with myself and with what I came to believe was a family and a society that demanded I live in the shadows. It was a fight more real and more damaging to me than anything I faced in the 59 professional boxing matches in which I made nearly five million dollars.

When I first got into boxing in 1989, female fighters were viewed as little more than a titillation for male spectators before the real boxing began. It was not seen by most fans as a true sporting event until I was fortunate enough to make it one with the help of Don King and Mike Tyson.

Female boxing was banned in most of the world when I first climbed into the ring on September 9, 1989. It remained that way for many years. It was neither an Olympic sport nor a professional one. In the few places where it was legal, it was ridiculed. Yet by the late afternoon of November 23, 2010, Christy Martin was one of the most famous boxers in the world. Unfortunately for me, on that day I would make headlines in a far different arena.

Before nightfall, I would be stabbed a half dozen times, have one of my calves sheared off like it was a pot roast, end up with an ear dangling off the side of my head from being pistol whipped and be left on the floor with a 9mm bullet hole in my chest. I was still the World Boxing Council women's super welterweight champion and the highest-earning female boxer in history, but I was a lot of other things too, and one was nearly dead. Dead on the inside as well as the outside.

I had been sexually abused at the age of 6 but kept it a dark secret for nearly 40 years. I was domestically abused for two decades but kept that a secret too. All that time I'd also been hiding the fact I was locked in a sham marriage designed to protect me from a world I'd come to believe would never accept me as I was. Why should it? My own mother hadn't.

While I appeared to be one person on the outside, the truth was I was at that point nearly broke, a cocaine addict and bleeding out on my carpet. Where once I would have done anything to avoid being knocked to the ground, I was ready to just lie there and let myself be counted out.

But it's funny what goes through your mind when your husband has shot you in the chest. Only minutes before Jim Martin pulled the trigger and finally ended 19 years of domestically abusing me in every way possible – mentally, physically and emotionally – I thought I wanted to die. I'd told my friends that for several days and, truth be told, Jim had told me he'd kill me for over 20 years if I ever left him, so it wasn't like I didn't know what was coming. In my mind, I was fine with it. Anything to end the life I'd been living. But even though I was willing to die, I wasn't willing to die without a fight.

Boxers say that all the time. We all say we're willing to die in the ring. For a lot of us it is true, unbelievable as that may sound. We think of ourselves as warriors because that's what we're trained to become. I believed in that code. It's the main reason I became so popular. I came to fight, and too much of the time I came to bleed and everyone knew it. Because of that, I didn't lose a fight for nearly a decade.

So it came as no surprise to me that on November 23, 2010, I'd made the decision I'd made. I was ready to die in the last fight of my life. The fight to free myself from a life that had gone batshit crazy, to be honest.

By that point, not many things surprised me, but my reaction to seeing my own handgun pointed at me did. It surprised the fighter in me that the world called "The Coal Miner's Daughter." That woman had once been a lost little girl growing up scared of who she was in a little West Virginia coal mining town. Much had changed about that little girl by then but not enough to save me from being abused, one way or another, for most of my life.

CHUCK SOLOMON

So the shocking reality that I wasn't as ready to quit on life as I thought stunned me like a punch in the face. I could feel myself mustering up the will to fight one more time.

Jim understood I was gay pretty much from the start of our relationship. Maybe he convinced himself otherwise for a while, but he knew the truth. So did I. We were just two lonely people thrust together in a hard world that didn't want to hear about gay female boxers. Or pay to watch them.

Around this time I'd reconnected with my first love, a girl I'd had a relationship with in high school named Sherry Lusk. That lasted until a year or so after we went off to college, but we drifted apart, as is usually the case with first loves. You go your separate ways but you never do forget them.

I was supposed to be in Tampa that Saturday night to work as a commentator on an amateur boxing show, but I told Jim I was going to drive to St. Augustine first to visit Sherry. He knew what she had once meant in my life but didn't seem bothered by it. In fact, he asked if he could come, even though he knew what the answer was.

Before I left, he reminded me of something I'd heard many times. He said, "If you leave me, I'll kill you." I'm sure that sounds pretty chilling, but he'd been saying it for so long it didn't register in the way it should have. You hear the words but you don't totally believe them anymore, which is how a lot of abused women end up dead.

I had gotten to the point where I was legit afraid he might kill me, but I was more afraid he would ruin my career. I thought he could take away everything I'd worked all my life to build, and I didn't have the courage to walk away and start over. I was a fading, 42-year-old prizefighter. Start over doing what?

The funny thing is the day I went to see Sherry, I didn't intend to spend the night. We were just going to meet and talk like old high school friends and then I was going on to Tampa. But I did stay and that's how things came to a head.

Martin has evolved from the troubled female star of Don King's stable ...

Jim called Thursday night and told me he knew where I was and what we were doing. He was threatening me without saying anything threatening. There was something in his voice.

You learn to sense trouble before it happens when you fight for a living. It's how you survive in boxing. Same thing in life. Trouble was brewing.

We had breakfast the next day and then I drove back home. Jim didn't say anything about where I'd been. The following day I drove to Tampa, and on the way Jim called and told me the promoter had a hotel room for me if I wanted to spend the night. I decided I'd do that.

Then I called Sherry and she agreed to meet me after the show, and we stayed together again before I drove home on Sunday. I didn't expect to see her any time soon or maybe ever again, but she called on Monday and I agreed to meet her in Daytona Beach.

I told Jim I was leaving again, but I didn't tell him where I was going. I got to Daytona first and checked us into our room. The minute she walked in, my phone rang. It was Jim.

"I'm so close I could touch you," he said, cold as ice. "I saw the way you greeted her." Then he hung up.

That freaked me out because I was afraid he might show up and kill me right there. When we finally went to get something to eat, my phone rang again.

"You're in my sights," is all he said. Then he hung up. The next day was November 23, the day that changed my life.

I was certain he was going to kill me, but like a fight against a big-name opponent, I knew I had to face him or run for the rest of my life. When I was boxing I never ran. I always came forward, even when I shouldn't have. This was probably one of those times I shouldn't have, but it was all I knew.

When I finally got home, I told Jim I was tired and needed to lay down and then wanted to go to the gym. My head was pounding. As I laid there, I could hear him sharpening that knife.

For some reason I sat up and put on one running shoe as he came into my room. He had his hands behind his back when he said, "I got something I

want to show you."

I thought maybe it was a contract for a fight. I hadn't fought in 14 months and it seemed like my career was over, but we both needed a payday and I thought maybe he'd come up with one. I was still the WBC super welterweight champion and I understood if you have a reputation and a championship belt you can still get paid, even if you're getting paid this time to take a beating.

That's when Jim turned his back and I saw the knife tucked in his waistband. To be honest, I never thought he'd stab me, so I just looked at him and said, "What are you going to do? Kill me?"

Just like that he was on me. He stabbed me deep three times on my left side and then one good time into my left breast. I started kicking and fighting, and that's when he started slashing me and cut my calf half off.

... to a promoter and role model esteemed by a new generation of women boxers.

Blood was spurting everywhere while he kept walking in and out of the room like a wild animal. Prowling.

I begged him to call 911. Instead he took the battery out of my Blackberry and threw it across the room. He unplugged the wall phone in the bathroom and walked into the bedroom holding it with the wire dangling down and said, "The phone isn't working." He was smiling when he said it.

That's when the switch flipped. A lot of people say they're ready to die and you might think that too if you're beaten down and lost, but what I learned that day is what you're really feeling isn't that you want to die. It's that you forgot how to live.

He was standing over me, holding my pink-handled 9mm Glock in his hand. We started fighting over it and I got my hand on the release button for the magazine and pressed it. The magazine kicked out but he still had a bullet left in the chamber.

Jim aimed it at me and I just lost it. I remember screaming, "You cannot kill me! You don't have the balls to shoot me."

Like everything else I'd thought about Jim Martin, I was wrong about that.

The man who had trained me, managed me, taught me everything I knew about boxing and was supposed to protect me shot me in the chest ... The doctors told me later three inches difference and I would have been dead. Then he walked into the bathroom, got in the shower and started washing the blood off his hands.

I grabbed some shirts and tried to hold the blood in against my chest. My lung was punctured and it started making gurgling noises. I was covered in blood as I fell back and was looking up at the ceiling, waiting to die, when I heard the shower running. Suddenly I didn't want to lose this fight.

I don't know how but I got up, grabbed my keys and the gun and stumbled out the door, but when I got outside I realized I had the wrong keys. I knew I couldn't go back in, so I ran into the street and kind of tried to carjack anyone who drove by. I'd never met the man who picked me up, but he was my angel. He put me in the backseat and we were gone.

The whole ordeal lasted just under an hour ... or 19 years, depending on how you look at it. The next time I saw Jim Martin, he was in handcuffs and I was training for a world championship comeback fight with a bullet hole in my chest.

How had my life come to this? To know that, we have to go back to the beginning and follow my journey from coal town to Vegas to damn near dead on the floor. My dream was to become a boxer and I lived that dream, but the truth is I was fighting long before I started boxing. Fighting for survival. After you read the rest of my story, you'll understand why.

Fighting for Survival: My Journey through Boxing Fame, Abuse, Murder and Resurrection is published by Rowman & Littlefield and is available now for pre-order at most major book retailers, including Amazon, Amazon UK and Barnes & Noble. It will be released on June 8.

WORLD BEAT

JAPAN

BY YURIKO MIYATA

Former WBA 115-pound titleholder Celes Kobayashi has been elected as the 14th president of the Japan Professional Boxing Association (JPBA). Kobayashi, who retired 20 years ago, began his first three-year term of office on April 1. (His predecessor, Susumu Hanagata, a former WBA flyweight titleholder, completed his three years of service.)

"Japanese boxing must go on," Kobayashi said. "We have to do what's best for current boxers." The new leader expressed his determination to work hard in the aftermath of the Japan Boxing Commission (JBC) being dissolved after 70 years of regulating the professional sport and its reformation plan still up in the air.

JPBA is an association of boxing stable owners that was established in 1931 and has developed a tradition of annual events to motivate and promote local boxers via tournaments, which includes the East and West regionals and the All-Japan Rookie King Tournament, as well as the B-class (six-rounders) tournament, A-class (eight- and 10-rounders) tournament, the elimination tournament for national titles and the Champion Carnival, in which all divisional Japanese champions are mandated to face the top contenders.

Japan's first International Boxing Hall of Famer, Fighting Harada, ended the first year of his brilliant professional career (1960) by winning the East Japan Rookie King Tournament (beating fellow prospect Hiroyuki Ebihara in the finals). Harada's first year (1960) was the final year of the regional tournament; no All-Japan version existed yet at that time. Harada is the JPBA's president emeritus after serving seven terms as the 10th chairman (from 1989-2010, more than any other president).

Kobayashi seems the right person to head the association in this difficult time of Japanese boxing. He was well-known during his rocky professional career. He lost his pro debut and struggled in all the tournaments – Rookie, B-class and A-class – before winning the Japanese flyweight title in his third attempt (against the same champion, Nolito Cabato, who previously held him to a technical draw and beat him by split decision) in 1998. He finally seized the WBA belt by stopping four-division titleholder Leo Gamez in 2001, rebounding from battling WBC flyweight titleholder Malcolm Tunacao to a draw the previous year. Kobayashi lost the 115-pound title in his second defense to mandatory challenger Alexander Munoz, who carried a perfect record of 21 wins, all by KO, in March 2002. Despite being knocked down five times by the heavy-hitting Venezuelan, Kobayashi showed his tenacity and tried to push the young star back by attacking the body until the referee halted it in the eighth round. This last stand (his final pro bout) is his signature fight.

Kobayashi opened up a gym in his hometown of Kashiwa, Chiba, in 2003 and guided Ryosuke Iwasa, one of his first pupils, to the IBF 122-pound title in 2017. He is one of the most active boxing luminaries, working as a stable owner, a trainer, TV commentator – and now taking on a big role in the JPBA. What's good is that he is a humble and reliable man. Just what is needed to lead the industry in the right direction.

Celes Kobayashi stopped Leo Gamez in 2001 to win the WBA junior bantamweight title.

PHOTO BY TOSHIFUMI KITAMURA

WORLD BEAT

★★★

In an unprecedented matter for Japanese boxing, former WBC female flyweight champion Go Shindo is planning to come back to the ring as a professional male boxer. Shindo's team announced that they have already applied for a licensing test at the end of April and are waiting for the answer from the JBC, which is busy settling its own problems. The boxer, who may be remembered for a close and good fight against Mariana "Barbie" Juarez in Ontario, California, in 2012, had made her gender identity disorder public while active as a female athlete and underwent sex-change operations and legal procedures after retiring from boxing following a loss to Naoko Fujioka in 2016. "I know that there are arguments on this matter and I am ready to listen to any opinions sincerely," the former female champion said.

"Gender" has been one of the most talked-about topics of the 21st century, and many amendments have applied to the sports world too. Transgender athletes are competing in the Olympic Games now. But when it comes to combat sports such as boxing and MMA, there must be more things to discuss. It is known that Patricio Manuel, who used to be a prominent female amateur boxer, became the first transgender man to box professionally in the United States when he won a unanimous decision in a four-round contest against Hugo Aguilar in December 2018, but it is his only fight so far.

Whether Shindo might be able to fight as a professional man now draws public attention in Japan. Some kind of move is expected before July 18, the day Shindo turns 35, which is the age expiration to take the licensing test under the JBC.

Go Shindo won the WBC female flyweight title in 2013 and made two successful defenses.

SOUTH AFRICA

BY DROEKS MALAN

Female junior welterweight prospect Hedda Wolmarans (7-0, 4 KOs) took a big step up when she faced the more experienced Ruth Chisale (11-1 at the time) from Malawi. After 10 rounds, Wolmarans won an unpopular unanimous decision and a regional IBF belt.

Fighting on her home turf in Johannesburg, Wolmarans got off to a good start, boxing from a distance in the opening round, landing her straight left from the southpaw stance with some body shots mixed in. It was not to last.

From the second bell, Chisale, who holds a win over current European welterweight champion Ornella Dömini and came in more than five pounds over the 140-pound limit, changed gears and went after the South African. She did two things well: She kept it at close quarters, negating Wolmarans' height and reach, and she let her hands go with abandon.

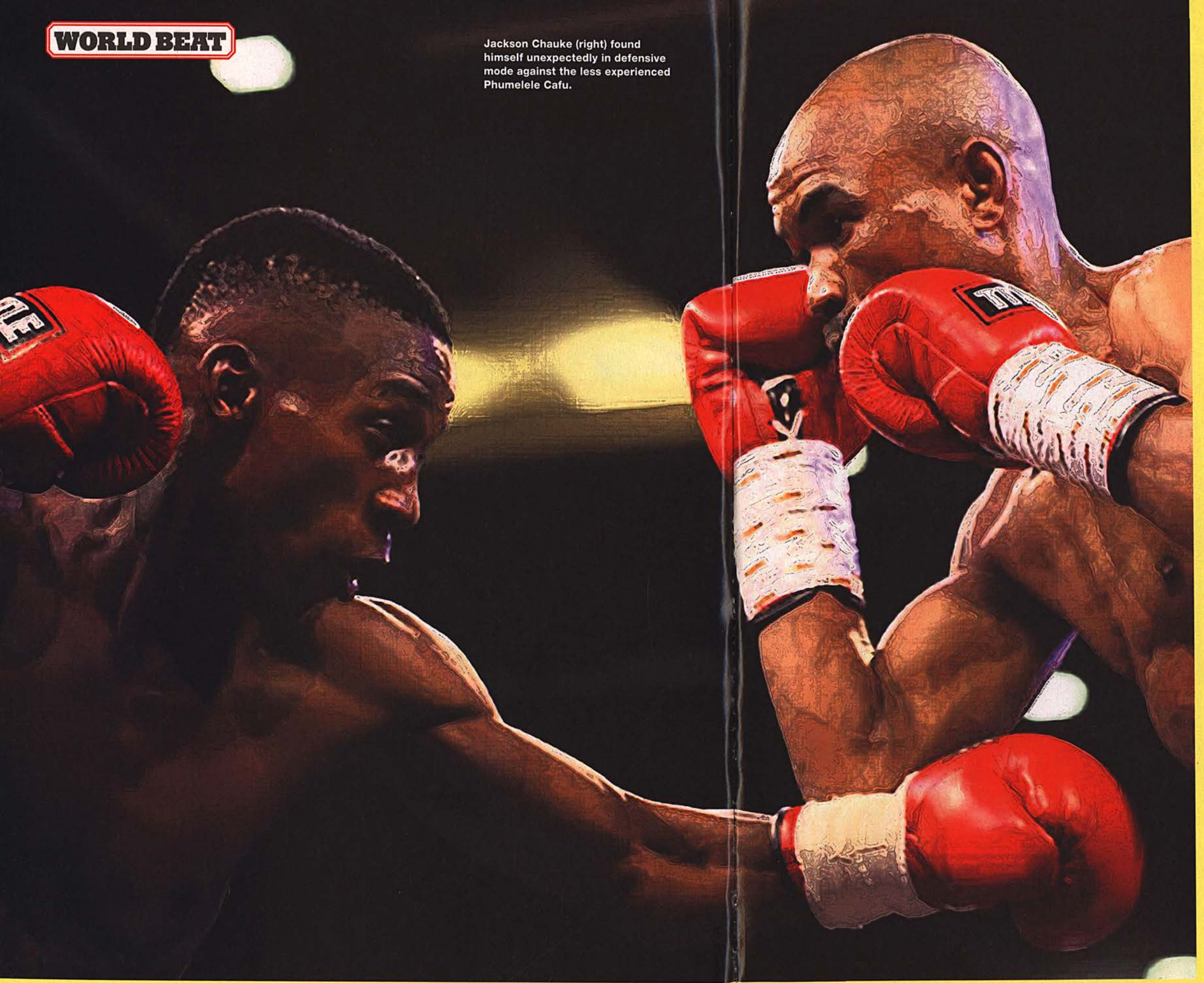
Wolmarans kept fighting back, but her Malawian opponent simply replied with more and then some. The South African appeared to be heading to a stoppage defeat in the fourth, gulping air in-between weathering attacks and looking flustered.

She was gutsy, though, and fought back well in the fifth, going to the body and landing some shots inside. But in the sixth and seventh, Chisale went back to work, driving Wolmarans around the ring.

Then, in the eighth, Wolmarans finally found her stride, wobbling Chisale with a right hook. She built on that by slamming in some straight lefts to the body in the ninth.

In a dramatic 10th, Wolmarans nailed Chisale with a right hook-left hand combination, hurting her badly. Trying desperately to score a

PHOTO BY THE ASAHI SHIMBUN



Jackson Chauke (right) found himself unexpectedly in defensive mode against the less experienced Phumelele Cafu.

WORLD BEAT

sensational stoppage, the South African flurried but did not have enough zip to put Chisale away.

It was one of the best female fights in a long time, but the scores left some ringsiders unhappy. Giving the South African the benefit of the doubt in close rounds, one card of 96-94 made sense, but the other two of 97-93 were an insult to Chisale.

Chisale is an exciting, aggressive fighter. Wolmarans, although overwhelmed at times, showed tremendous heart and conditioning. Both ladies can punch, a rare commodity in female boxing. A rematch would certainly be welcomed.

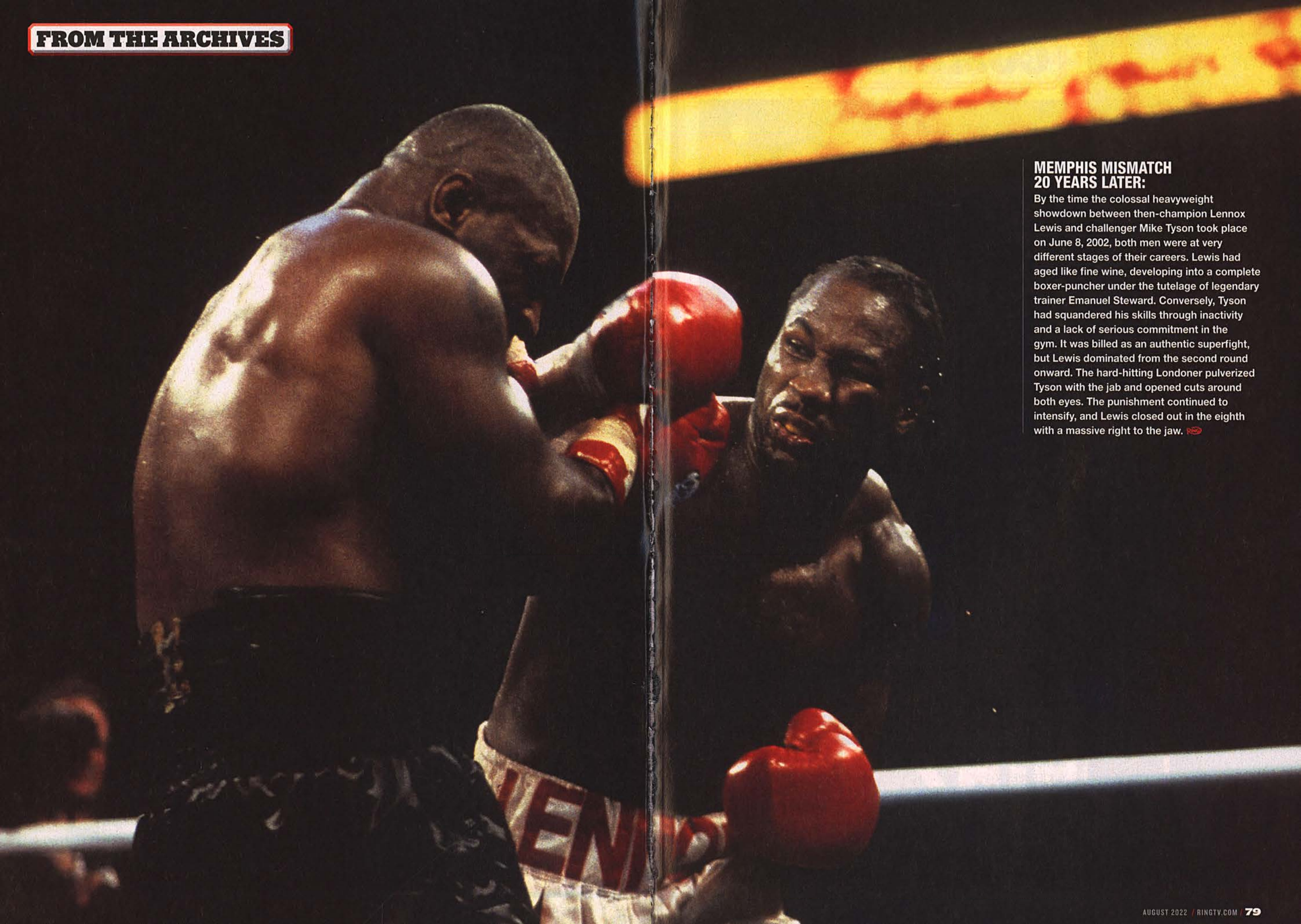
The Ring's No. 9-ranked flyweight, Jackson Chauke, was expected to make easy work of inexperienced Phumelele Cafu, who came into their South African title fight in East London with an unremarkable 4-0-2 record. Instead, Chauke had to salvage a majority draw over 12 rounds when the challenger gave him all he could handle in a very good fight, with both fighters displaying high skill levels.

It was another fight with plenty of close rounds where one had to pick between the more telling blows of Chauke and the quick flurries of the busier Cafu. Chauke boxed well in spots behind his jab, finding the target with his straight right, but then Cafu fired back with flashy combinations only for Chauke to reply with a sneaky left uppercut.

An extended toe-to-toe exchange had the crowd on their feet, singing and dancing, where they remained until the final round, when both fighters let it all hang out.

The ring announcer read two scores of 114-114 with a third dissenting score of 115-113 for Cafu and then, inexplicably, announced Cafu the winner by majority decision! Officials at ringside waited until the next day to rectify the error.

At least justice was served in the end. Chauke moves to 20-1-2 and, at the age of 36, hopefully a shot at a major belt holder ASAP. As for Cafu, he has served notice as a prospect to watch.



MEMPHIS MISMATCH 20 YEARS LATER:

By the time the colossal heavyweight showdown between then-champion Lennox Lewis and challenger Mike Tyson took place on June 8, 2002, both men were at very different stages of their careers. Lewis had aged like fine wine, developing into a complete boxer-puncher under the tutelage of legendary trainer Emanuel Steward. Conversely, Tyson had squandered his skills through inactivity and a lack of serious commitment in the gym. It was billed as an authentic superfight, but Lewis dominated from the second round onward. The hard-hitting Londoner pulverized Tyson with the jab and opened cuts around both eyes. The punishment continued to intensify, and Lewis closed out in the eighth with a massive right to the jaw.

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COMING UP

The rematch between Ring bantamweight champion Naoya Inoue and future hall of famer Nonito Donaire takes place on June 7 in Japan.

JUNE

JUNE 7 – Naoya Inoue vs. Nonito Donaire, bantamweights (for Inoue's Ring/IBF/WBA and Donaire's WBC titles), Saitama, Japan.
JUNE 10 – Hiroto Kyoguchi vs. Esteban Bermudez, junior flyweights (for Kyoguchi's Ring/WBA titles), Mexico City (DAZN).
JUNE 18 – Artur Beterbiev vs. Joe Smith Jr., light heavyweights (for Beterbiev's IBF/WBC and Smith's WBO titles), New York (ESPN/ESPN+).
JUNE 18 – Jermall Charlo vs. Maciej Sulecki, middleweights (for Charlo's WBC title), Houston (Showtime).
JUNE 25 – Jesse Rodriguez vs. Srisaket Sor Rungvisai, junior bantamweights (for Rodriguez's WBC title), San Antonio, Texas (DAZN). Also, Murodjon Akhmadaliev vs. Ronny Rios, junior featherweights (for Akhmadaliev's IBF/WBA titles); Jessica McCaskill vs. Alma Ibarra, welterweights (for McCaskill's undisputed championship); Julio Cesar Martinez vs. McWilliams Arroyo, flyweights (for Martinez's WBC title).
JUNE 25 – Hekkie Budler vs. Elwin Soto, junior flyweights, Mexicali, Mexico.

JULY

JULY 9 – Mairis Briedis vs. Jai Opetaia, cruiserweights (for Briedis' Ring/IBF titles), Broadbeach, Australia.
JULY 9 – Mark Magsayo vs. Rey Vargas, featherweights (for Magsayo's WBC title), San Antonio, Texas (Showtime).
JULY 23 – Oleksandr Usyk vs. Anthony Joshua, heavyweights (for Usyk's IBF/WBA/WBO titles), Saudi Arabia.

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